
CHAPTER THREE : THE DEMON LORD DEFEATS A MONSTER
The light faded to reveal a small girl.
"Tell me I'm cute, m'kay?"
Why Shouldn't a Detestable Demon Lord FALL IN LOVE?!
2
STORY
Nekomata Nuko
ILLUSTRATION
teffish


"This weather is just awesome!"
"I wanna pay!"
"It's a perfect day for the beach, m'kay?!"
CHAPTER FIVE : THE DEMON LORD MAKES FOR THE CAPITAL


CHAPTER TWO : THE DEMON LORD TAKES HIS FAMILY ON A TRIP
"It's nice and warm."
"So compy!"
"How relaxing..."



ORIGINAL STORY: **Nekomata Nuko** | ILLUSTRATION: **teffish**

SOL PRESS

TRANSLATION:
David Prileszky

EDITING:
Adam Haffen

TYPESETTING:
Brandon Imber

PROOFREADING:
Simon Engmann
Mary Borsellino

MEDIA PRODUCTION:
Marie "Kid" H.

PRODUCTION MGR:
Matthew Carolan

PUBLISHING MGR:
Adam Haffen

CEO:
Michael Valdez

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VOLUME 2
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Why Shouldn't a Detestable Demon Lord Fall in Love?!

VOL. 2

Original Story by Nekomata Nuko

Illlustrations by teffish

Prologue: The Knights Face Defeat

The eastern wastelands of the country of Raiten were home to a bottomless ravine, a scar left on the world as a gruesome reminder of the terror sewn by the Harbinger. A single strike from the fierce demon had split the world in two.

Though it was massive, traversing the Great Divide was not impossible; there were three different methods available to get to the other side:

The first option was to use a magic stone that allowed for flight. Rare and expensive, they provided the quickest, safest way to cross the ominous pit.

The second option was to take an alternative route. The fissure extended far beyond the horizon, so going around it took a considerable amount of time, but it did allow one to reach the other side.

The final option was to take the bridge. It was not a man-made structure; rather, it had formed naturally during the Harbinger's furious rampage. When the ground was split apart, a part of it had miraculously remained intact, leaving a path across the humongous expanse. Being the sole piece of land to survive the attack that had created the endless divide, its sturdiness was unquestionable, and as such, many travelers preferred to use it to get across.

Connecting Raiten's port town with a commercial city, the land bridge had served as an important trade route for hundreds of years. However, that had changed three months earlier.

"Wh-What is this?!"

Shaer, commander of the Raiten Knights' First Corps and a woman serving directly under the king, wiped the sweat off her spotless face. A dozen of her trusty subordinates were lying unconscious right in front of the bridge. She had managed to ready her shield in the nick of time, but it was all for naught. Her enemy had thinned the group of famed knights in mere moments with a blast of wind.

Reports of the beast had told of its ability to fire such blasts, but their speed

and power were greater than she could have ever imagined. The last thing Shaer had expected was for her shield, imbued with powerful and extremely rare magic, to crumble and her troops to fall after a single strike from some ruffian.

“Y-You monster!” she shouted, her voice tinged with both hatred and panic.

What stood before her was a monster in more than just name. Its appearance, too, was that of a terrible beast. Its muscular, rock-hard body covered in jade-green scales was complemented by two gigantic wings and a long tail with a sharp talon at the end. The beast wasn’t overly massive, but a single look at it was enough to send shivers down her spine.

Those chills were only partly due to the monster’s appearance, however. The power it displayed by quickly and easily wiping out her troops was much more terrifying. Shaer was the strongest of the Raiten Knights—strong enough on her own to scare foreign powers into submission—yet her troops had been downed and she herself left completely defenseless. The odds she would emerge victorious from her encounter with such a beast were practically zero.

Still, she couldn’t watch her subordinates perish under her command. Driven by her desire to save their lives, she mustered up all her courage and stood, drawing the sword the king himself had presented her with as she glared at the creature.

Like her shield, her sword was more than just steel. The handle was inlaid with a magic stone, able to produce a violent burst of sharp wind that relentlessly cut through the strongest armor. She had what was effectively a deadly whirlwind at her command.

Channeling her mana into the sword, she prepared to strike while the monster had its back turned. It was about to return to the middle of the bridge, which was decorated with a vast amount of weapons, armor, and other such items from Hunters that had previously arrived to dispatch the monster. Such ornaments were proof of its overwhelming power, but it had its back turned, ready to retreat. Was such a powerful monster afraid of Shaer?

“So, you’re choosing to run?!” Shaer asked while keeping her guard up against a possible surprise attack. She had been tasked with defeating the monster that

terrorized the area, and as such, she couldn't let it run away.

"'Run'? Don't make me laugh!" the monster shot back, turning to face her. "You bore me to death, m'kay?"

The reports had mentioned that the monster was capable of human speech, so Shaer wasn't caught off guard. After all, it wasn't an actual demon, but a human whose appearance was altered through the use of a magic stone. What did surprise her, however, was its voice. She hadn't expected the magic stone user to be a girl, though that revelation didn't change her objective.

"Whether you're having fun means nothing to me! I won't let the crimes you've committed go unpunished! Surrender at once if you wish to remain unharmed!"

"That toy sword will never work on me! I was kind enough to not hit you directly with my Wind Blast, so be a good girl and run home, m'kay?"

The beast had deliberately missed Shaer with the attack that had wiped out the rest of her troops. However, that left her wondering if the girl who had transformed with the help of a magic stone looked down on her because she was a woman. Shaer couldn't allow herself to be humiliated in such a way, but more than that, the girl had had the audacity to mock her sword, the very weapon that signified her pride as commander of the First Corps. That was the final straw; Shaer was ready to fight her to the death.

"Shall we put that to the test? Let us see if this sword is truly as useless as you make it out to be!"

She poured mana into her weapon and slashed the air diagonally, sending a razor-sharp blade of wind—said to be able to demolish mountains—at the monster.

"Wha—?!" Shaer cried upon seeing her slash connect with her foe. "It had no effect?!"

All her might channeled into a single attack wasn't enough to put even a scratch on the monster. Despair began to creep into her heart, but she suddenly noticed a thin layer of ice climbing up the monster. One of her subordinates had regained consciousness and sealed its movements.

“Are you okay?” Shaer asked.

“More or less, so leave the rest to us, Commander! You have to take this chance and run!”

“What?! I will never leave my troops behind! I’ll fight at your side until the bitter end!”

“Please, just go! I know you’re powerful, but you can’t win here! There’s only one person in the country who stands any chance against this monster. We’ll buy you some time, so please, find Lord Merkalt and bring him here!” As painful as it was for Shaer to leave her subordinates behind, it was clear that she couldn’t subdue the beast. The only one capable of such a feat was the strongest man in the country: Malshan Merkalt. “Go, Commander! Run!”

“Ngh… U-Understood! I swear on my life that I won’t let your hard work be in vain!”

Focusing her mana into a ring that contained a Pegasus stone, sparkling, snow-white wings sprouted from her back. She immediately began flapping her magical wings and flew away.

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As the monster watched Shaer fly off into the distance, she raised her legs, shattering the ice that had been restricting her movements.

“Tch…”

The knight’s only objective was to delay her, if only for a second longer. He, who had encased her legs in ice before, began focusing his mana into his ring again, whereupon she walked over to him.

“Don’t think that flimsy sheet of ice will work on me, m’kay?” She slammed her sharp claws into the ice, shattering it. The man behind the curtain of ice shards flying through the air went completely pale. “You lost. Now scurry back home, m’kay?”

“Wh-What?”

“Are you deaf?” she asked, looking at the confused man as if he were a pesky fly. “Go home. You all failed, m’kay?”

“‘Failed’? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You bore me to death! I held back as much as I could and you losers *still* blacked out! You might be better than those worms who broke down in tears and begged for their lives, but that doesn’t amount to much. You’re slightly braver worms, m’kay?” After she finished talking, she was ready to return to the middle of the bridge, but something suddenly came to her mind. “That ‘Lord Whatsit’ you mentioned before had better be strong, m’kay?”

“Lord Merkalt is the strongest Hunter in the country! Your days controlling this bridge are numbered!”

“Just make sure not to send another woman, m’kay?” The knight could only nod in response to her strange demand. “Good. But still, those other worms said your group was strong, so I won’t get my hopes up, m’kay?”

She flew back to the middle of the bridge while muttering to herself, then looked at the defeated knights as they slowly woke up one after another and made their retreat, keeping an eye on the terrifying monster as they did. Once they’d disappeared beyond the horizon, the girl let out a sigh and lay down beneath the azure sky to watch the fluffy clouds float by, quickly becoming drowsy.

“I hope I’ll find the strongest man in the world soon, m’kay…”

Just like that, Bram Boise, the monster on the bridge, fell asleep.

Chapter One: The Demon Lord Picks Up a Knight

As they walked the streets of Garaat, the pleasant sunlight shining down on Anima and his beloved family, together with the gentle breeze stroking their cheeks, made for a perfect day to get lunch in town.

How is it possible to be this adorable?

They had entered a busy restaurant and sat down next to a window, the appetizing aroma of freshly cooked meals coiling around them. Anima didn't pay it much heed, however. His eyes were glued to the bundle of cuteness in front of him, and his mouth curled into a smile.

"Nummy!" his adorable youngest daughter Marie exclaimed as she stuffed her cheeks with a spoonful of steaming beef stew.

Her fluffy hair, big, innocent eyes, and chubby cheeks trapped Anima's gaze. His lunch was slowly going cold, but that didn't matter in the slightest. He'd have gladly died of starvation if it meant he could watch his daughter merrily chomp away at her lunch for only a second longer.

"You'll choke on it if you don't slow down! Jeez, and you got it all over your face!"

His eldest daughter, the red-haired Myuke, gently wiped Marie clean with a handkerchief, putting a gleeful smile on the little girl's face.



“Teeheehee, that’s tickly!”

“Calm down, and don’t squirm so much. There we go; nice and clean!”

“Thank you!” Marie said as she brought another spoonful of stew to her mouth and began chewing away at the beef chunks as best she could with her small mouth.

“Hey, it’s all over your face again!”

“Do the tickly!”

“Yeah, yeah. You sure love getting spoiled, don’t you?” Myuke once again picked up the handkerchief and wiped Marie’s face clean, then brought a spoonful of stew to her own mouth, careful not to drip any sauce on her blue sundress. As soon as she did, she smiled with delight. “Mmm, delicious! It’s so tender!”

Anima’s smile hadn’t wavered a bit since they’d sat down. He couldn’t get enough of watching his adorable daughters enjoy their lunch. It was like a dream come true for him.

I don’t deserve to have these two angels in my life…

“Anima? Are you not hungry by any chance?”

His attention toward his daughters was pulled away by a clear voice. As he turned to look at the seat next to him, the image of a beautiful, fair maiden entered his field of vision. A gentle warmth was nested in the woman’s azure eyes, and her long blue hair, contrasted by her pure-white sundress, was tied up with a ribbon. Anima was completely captivated by the dazzling beauty that was his wife, Luina Scarlett.

“Umm…” Luina turned away upon feeling his burning gaze and gently rubbed her cheeks. “Is there something on my face?”

“No, nothing.”

“Then why are you staring at my lips like that?” she inquired after letting out a relieved sigh and turning back toward him.

“Because I was hoping we could share another kiss.”

“I want to kiss you too,” she said, her cheeks having already become rosy, “but it’d be embarrassing in public. Could it wait until, um… until we get home?”

Luina took Anima’s hand. His smile widened in response, and he interlocked his fingers with hers. Much to his surprise, however, she reacted to his heartfelt gesture by puffing out her cheeks and posing a question.

“Can you eat while your dominant hand is occupied? Oh, I know! Let me feed you!”

“Are you sure?” he asked. His dominant hand may have been busy, but he was not a child. Using his non-dominant hand to hold the spoon and bring it to his mouth without spilling anything was not a challenge for him.

“You always look out for us,” she said with a nod, “so feeding my beloved husband is the least I can do.”

“Luina…”

He was floored. Holding hands was enough to send him swimming in a sea of euphoria; the prospect of being fed by his lovely wife was something his mortal heart could barely handle.

“Open wide, Anima! Here comes the carriage!”

“Ahhhmn…”

I’m the happiest man in this world, he thought as he gulped down a spoonful of pure bliss.

His days had been filled with joy ever since he’d met Luina, but even as little as three months earlier, he could never have imagined leading such a happy life. After all, he was a detestable Demon Lord, despised by all of mankind. Deserted by his parents and despised by his siblings, loneliness was all he’d ever known. Starting a family of his very own was the only way out of his guard-less prison.

With that desire burning in his heart, he went to his father for advice, and was told that women flock to the strong. Anima took those words to heart, spending a century training his body by fighting only the strongest opponents, both men

and demons alike. However, it wasn't long before he began being referred to not as "King of the Demons", but as "Demon Lord"—as the most terrifying being in all the land. His name became synonymous with death, terror, and destruction. He hated every moment of his cursed existence, his days having become an endless cycle of massacring aspiring heroes and self-loathing.

But one day, his eternal damnation came to a sudden end when Luina used her family's secret artifact to summon him into her world. It was love at first sight, and he proposed to her on the spot. Luina accepted his proposal, which meant that he had found not only a wonderful spouse, but also two adorable children in Marie and Myuke. The peaceful life he led with his family had, at long last, turned his lifelong dream into a reality. His happiness was immeasurable.

"…nima? Anima? Hello, Anima? Can you hear me?"

"I was thinking about the day we met," Anima said after suddenly being pulled back to reality. "I can't thank you enough for saying yes when I asked you to marry me."

"Anima…" Luina whispered, smiling gently. "I'm the one who should be thanking you. You truly are the best husband I could have ever wished for. You're always helping me with the chores, helping with the finances… We can even afford to take the children out to eat. It's like I'm dreaming."

She turned toward her daughters and watched them as they enjoyed their warm meal. In the past, the Scarlett family had a contract with the country's government that allowed them to live in the lap of luxury in exchange for remaining ever-present on the battlefield in case of emergency.

Luina's life was turned upside down after her father's death, however. In order to support her deathly ill mother and the children of the orphanage, she had to sell almost all of her possessions. The hardships amplified even further with her mother's passing. Unable to support so many children alone, only Marie and Myuke were able to stay with her. At the end of her wits, she had at one point even considered selling the house filled with memories of her family in order to make ends meet.

Luckily, with the three hundred silver Anima had earned, she didn't have to

harbor such thoughts any longer; the four of them could live comfortably. It wasn't the life of luxury she'd once had, but being able to afford eating out with the children was more than she could have ever asked for. It was only natural that she was grateful to Anima after all the misery she'd gone through, but there was one thing he had to clarify.

"I didn't make that money alone. Myuke did half of the work."

"Mm-hmm, that she did." Luina looked at Myuke with a warm expression. "Thanks to your hard work, we can all enjoy this delicious lunch. Thank you, Myuke."

"Thanks, Myukey!"

"Y-You don't need to thank me!" Everyone's praise made Myuke's cheeks flush. "I only did what I had to!"

While looking at his adorable daughter, Anima raised a spoonful of stew to his mouth. It would probably have tasted better if Luina had fed it to him, but he didn't want to keep her from eating her own lunch. Instead, the four of them each ate their lunches on their own.

"Daddy, what's af'er lunch?" Marie asked after everyone had finished eating. She stared at Anima, clearly excited about something.

"Hmm, what was it again? Could you remind Daddy?"

"Listen!" she cooed, her eyes sparkling as he took the bait. "It's 'Thanks for the meeeaaal!' 'Member, Daddy?"

"Thanks for the meeeaaal! Well? How did I do?"

"Wooow! So 'mart!" Marie lauded as she excitedly clapped her hands. "See that, Mommy? Daddy's sooo 'mart!"

"I did! Well done, Anima. You did well too, Marie."

"Ehehe! It was yummy!"

"I'm glad to hear that," Anima said with a smile. "Is your tummy full?"

"Uh-huh!"

"I'm full too," Myuke said. "I gotta do some exercise so I don't get fat."

“I don’t think it would be bad if you put on some weight. It would look good on you.”

“But then I wouldn’t fit into the dress you bought me,” she retorted. She really loved the dress Anima had gotten her—so much so that she promised to only wear it for outings.

“Then I’ll buy you a new one.”

“Are you sure?” she asked, shooting a reserved glance at Anima.

“You bet I am. Right, Luina?”

“You always work so hard,” she replied with a nod and a radiant smile. “There’s no need to be reserved. Not to mention that you’re still growing. Make sure you tell us if your clothes start to get tight.”

“Yaaay! Thank you! Is there anything I can help with today?”

“Me too!” Marie cheered. “I wanna help too!”

“Then how about you help Daddy collect the laundry when we get home?”

“Okay!” the girls cried joyfully as they excitedly nodded.

With their lunch finished, Anima paid for the meal and they left the cozy restaurant with the giddy Marie in his arms. The family made their way through the town’s arched gate and set off back home.

On their way down the narrow dirt road, they spotted a trail of knocked-down trees, prompting Anima to glance anxiously at Luina. Her usual bright smile was nowhere to be found; she was staring forward blankly. Anima could make an educated guess as to why she was feeling down. They were at the very place where they’d had an unfortunate encounter with Malshan.

Just like Luina’s father, Malshan was a mercenary employed by the kingdom. He was said to be the strongest Hunter in the land, tasked with protecting the kingdom from the greatest of dangers and disasters. As a key figure in the kingdom’s defenses and a man holding supposedly unrivaled power, getting into a fight with him would no doubt have grave repercussions. Regardless, Anima had smacked him down, potentially making an enemy of the entire kingdom in doing so.

For better or worse, Malshan's whereabouts were unknown, and no one besides Anima and his family knew about the incident that had transpired. Their involvement hadn't come to light, but the possibility of them waking up as wanted criminals was incredibly distressing for Luina. She was fully aware of Anima's overwhelming strength—he would probably have been able to single-handedly fight off the world, let alone the country—but Anima didn't wish for all-out war. He loved his newfound home; he didn't want it to be destroyed, or even so much as for his peaceful life to be sacrificed. All he wanted was to eat another lovely lunch with his family in that cozy restaurant.

"Hmm?" Without warning, Myuke stopped walking and broke the long silence. "Look, there's something on the ground—"

The color drained from her face as she spotted someone collapsed right beside their house.

"The scary man's back?"

Marie was getting scared. She wrapped her arms tightly around Anima's neck and looked at him with tears in her eyes, terrified of Malshan returning.

"Don't worry, he won't come back," he assured her with a powerful smile. "And if he does, Daddy'll protect you."

Malshan had learned the overwhelming difference between their strengths. Even if he was alive, approaching Anima again would have been foolish. He absolutely despised Anima, but the terror nested in his soul would certainly have been more powerful than his desire to take revenge, so it was unlikely that the person collapsed there was Malshan.

Still, the situation was very unusual—and potentially dangerous. To ensure his family's safety, Anima put Marie down and approached the collapsed person. In doing so, he discovered that it was not Malshan, but a young girl with sparkling, golden hair and a spotless, young-looking face. However, one glance at the broadsword on her hip confirmed that she was not your average town girl.

Could she be an assassin sent by Malshan to—

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a deep rumble, which immediately dispelled any fear he had.

“Luina, hurry!”

“Is she alive?” Luina, even paler than before, asked as she ran toward her husband and the unconscious girl.

“Did a demon do this?!” Myuke shouted, then grabbed Anima’s sleeve and scanned the area.

“Don’t worry, she wasn’t attacked by a demon. She collapsed from exhaustion.”

Immediately after Anima’s explanation, another deep growl cut through the area.

“Ughhh… To think that I, Shaer, would collapse from hunger… I’ll never rid myself of this shame…” the girl mumbled before passing out again. In response, Luina let out a sigh of relief and turned toward Anima.

“Could you please bring… Shaer, was it? Could you please bring her to the dining room?”

Anima couldn’t deny a request from Luina. He lifted the girl up and they made their way into the house.

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The moment Anima sat Shaer down on the chair they’d bought two months earlier, she slumped down on the table. She was effectively paralyzed from hunger, but in the interest of safety, Anima made sure to strip her of her weapons. He took the sword hung at her side and placed it against the wall.

“She went night-night?”

“She must be dead tired. Let her sleep, Marie.”

Myuke took Marie’s hand and hid behind Anima’s back. She didn’t want her precious little sister to approach some unknown woman, and Anima couldn’t have agreed more. He had confiscated her weapon, but as long as her limbs were attached, the threat of an attack was still present. He kept his eyes glued to her so he could jump in and protect his daughters at a moment’s notice, but at the same time, he was worried for her. She seemed to have been on the brink of passing out from hunger.

“Soup’s on!” Luina sang as she walked into the dining room, carrying a bowl of bean soup.

The moment the enticing aroma of the steaming soup tickled Shaer’s nostrils, she raised her head and scanned the room for the source like a starved beast. Upon locating the manna, her stomach growled in relief. An audible gulp helped clear both her throat and mind as she glanced at Anima and the others in the room.

“H-Have you been so kind as to prepare this for me?”

“Eat up,” Luina answered with a smile. “There’s plenty more.”

“My gratitude will follow you to the grave! Thank you!” Shaer replied with a bright smile.

“AHHH! NOOO!” Marie let out an ear-splitting scream just as Shaer grabbed the spoon and got ready to dive into the steaming soup, leading her to dejectedly furrow her brow.

“Making a starving girl wait after enticing them with the prospect of salvation… What a cruel form of torture.”

Marie, unfamiliar with the word “torture”, tilted her head. She didn’t care enough to be confused for long, however, and immediately clasped her hands together.

“You gotta thank Mommy ’fore lunch! Watch, like this! Thanks for the meal!”

“Oh my, how rude of me,” Shaer said with a relieved smile. “My hunger made me forget proper etiquette. Thank you for the meal, Ma’am! How was that?”

“Yaaay! Good! You can munch now!”

Having received Marie’s approval, she immediately began shoveling the soup into her mouth. After a couple of spoonfuls, she stuffed her cheeks with the bread Luina served on the side, and washed it all down with a big gulp of milk.

“Wooow! She’s munchin’ lots! Sooo fast!”

Marie stared wide-eyed at the incredible display of speed unfolding before her. If Shaer were in a speed eating contest, she would have been winning by a landslide.

“She really is.”

Still holding Marie’s hand, Myuke was still on guard while watching Shaer devour her meal. She wore the same cautious look she’d worn when she’d first met Anima. She was extremely wary of strangers, but not because of a lack of trust. She wanted nothing more than to protect her precious little sister, so she remained ever-vigilant. She couldn’t allow a slip-up when Marie’s safety was on the line.

While her disposition toward Anima had changed upon learning that he was Luina’s husband, Shaer was a complete stranger. She didn’t seem to be an assassin sent by Malshan with the ingenious plot of creating an illusion of safety and trust by faking hunger, but her intentions were still shrouded in mystery. Hearing her tale was the family’s top priority, but they had to feed her before they could do that. She couldn’t share anything while passed out, after all.

“Ghah!”

Being under constant surveillance from all directions may have gotten to Shaer, as she choked on a bite of bread. She reached out for her glass of milk, but it was already empty.

“Drink this. It’s water.”

She took the glass of water from Myuke and chugged it. After setting the empty glass down, she bowed her head so deep she almost bumped it on the table.

“You truly are my savior!” she declared. “I swear on my pride as a knight that I’ll return your kind favor one day!”

“N-Nooo!”

“H-Have I done something wrong?” Shaer asked shakily in response to Marie’s sudden scream.

“You gotta thank Mommy affer lunch too! Watch, watch! I’ll show you!” Marie again clasped her hands together and thanked Luina. “Did you see?”

“You’re a very smart little girl,” Shaer said, letting out another relieved sigh. “A child your age who is so knowledgeable about table manners is a rarity.”

“Thanks!”

Feeling that she was getting praised, Marie broke into an adorable smile. Her joy must have been contagious, as Shaer’s strained expression let up in response.

“As the little lady pointed out, I have forgotten to give you my thanks for the meal. Thank you, Ma’am. How was that?”

“Good!”

Seeing Marie excitedly clap for her, Shaer’s mouth curled into a warm, gentle smile—not the type that would belong to a bloodthirsty assassin. That smile, in addition to her having left herself completely defenseless while she ate, was enough for Anima to conclude that their encounter was a coincidence and finally let his guard down. Myuke, however, was still on edge, and stared at Shaer with a grave expression.

“So, are you a knight?” she asked, shooting a sharp glare in her direction.

“That’s correct,” the knight said, and stood up straight. “I am Shaer, commander of the First Corps of the Raiten Knights.”

“I-Is that so…” Myuke anxiously grabbed Anima’s sleeve.

“What’s a ‘knight’?”

“You see, knights, at the king’s command, ensure that bad people are punished.”

“But Daddy beat the bad people!”

Myuke nodded with a bittersweet smile at Marie’s boasting. It had clearly worried her, and with good reason. If the circumstances of Malshan’s disappearance had come to light, it wouldn’t have been unexpected for the king to send knights to capture Anima. While Anima considered the possibilities, Shaer looked straight at him.

“I assume ‘Daddy’ would be you?”

“Yes.”

“You must be a Hunter, then.”

“I am, yes.”

He held a Hunter license, so despite never having taken a job, he was technically a Hunter. Hearing that, Shaer smiled.

“We are much the same. We both make a living off of dealing with scoundrels.”

“Are there many scoundrels in this area?” Anima asked in hopes of learning more about where they lived, but Shaer simply shook her head.

“Don’t worry. I haven’t heard of any criminals lurking in this area.”

“Then why did we find you collapsed here?”

“It’s quite embarrassing to admit considering my position,” she chuckled awkwardly as Anima jumped straight to the point, “but I took to the skies to search for Lord Merkalt in hopes of requesting aid from him. While in the air, terrible hunger and my severe lack of mana caused me to plummet into the ground.”

Their encounter had been an honest-to-goodness coincidence, but she had just revealed a rather grim piece of information, sending a shade of doubt washing over Luina’s and Myuke’s faces. Anima glanced at them, signaling that they should leave the rest to him.

“That ‘Merkalt’. Are you talking about Malshan? The man who wields the Crimson Dragon stone?”

“I am,” she said, nodding. “The vermin we were tasked to exterminate is powerful beyond human comprehension. The only person who could possibly stand up to that beast is Lord Merkalt, and as such, I’m on my way to his mansion to put in a formal request for help.”

“Don’t go,” Anima said curtly, but didn’t go into specifics.

Shaer going to Malshan’s home would no doubt stir some trouble. If she found him, they would inevitably end up talking about the battle; if she didn’t, it would evolve into a full-on investigation into his whereabouts. If he was tracked as far as the orphanage and the shaven-down forest nearby, Anima would probably be brought in as the prime suspect.

To avoid any serious trouble down the line, it might have been for the best to come clean. Shaer seemed to have a strong sense of justice; she was likely to side with them if he explained the circumstances.

“Why not? Ah, I assume it’d be rude to leave without helping with the dishes. My sincerest apologies for my manners, but I’m absolutely terrible at doing chores. I would only break something…”

“No, it’s not that. I have something to tell you before you leave for Malshan’s house.”

“What would that be?”

Anima took a deep breath and opened his mouth.

“I fought and defeated Malshan.”

“You did what now?” Shaer narrowed her eyes. “With all due respect, I find it difficult to imagine that you defeated Lord Merkalt given that he’s the strongest individual in the kingdom. I can’t think of a reason for you to fight him to begin with.”

Anima expected her to be doubtful of such claims, and had already prepared evidence. He opened one of the cabinets, removed his proof, and set it on the table.

“Do you know what this is?”

“H-How…? Why do you have this?”

Shaer’s eyes flew open as Anima revealed an earring inlaid with a crimson stone. It was a magic stone that had formed after the death of a terrible beast that ravaged the lands three centuries ago. The Crimson Dragon stone must have had a peculiar glint to it, as the knight recognized it with no more than a single glance.

“Malshan came here and threatened to turn us to ashes by conjuring a fireball, so I fought back. He vanished, leaving only this earring behind.”

“Wh-Why would he attack you?”

It was a natural question, one that Anima couldn’t answer truthfully. Malshan’s aim, the Harbinger stone, was a well-guarded secret of the Scarlett

family. The stone's existence itself—let alone Luina's possession of it—was only known to a select few. Without her permission, Anima's hands were tied.

"He was after Luina. He tried to woo her, but the fact that we're married and that she loves me was something he couldn't come to terms with."

"Hm, so he went mad with love? Embarrassing as it may be, I have never experienced such intense feelings. Is that really enough to drive an honorable man to massacre a whole family?"

She dressed it differently, but the crux of the matter was that she didn't buy into Anima's story. Worried that revealing their secret was the only option left, Anima glanced at Luina, who, after a timid nod, opened her mouth.

"The truth is… he was after the secret treasure of the Scarlett family."

"The Scarletts' treasure?" Shaer asked, raising an eyebrow. "I have never heard of such a thing, but the more pressing question is why you would know about such a thing."

"Because I'm a Scarlett."

Shaer's eyes popped wide open.

"Y-You're—?! Lady Luina, you're a member of the Scarlett family?!"

"Yes, I am…" Luina replied, just as confused as Shaer after hearing her respectful tone.

"A-Are you Lord Rei's daughter, by chance?"

"You know my father?"

Shaer suddenly jumped up from her seat and looked at Luina, her eyes sparkling.

"Very much so! I owe him my life; he saved me during my first mission. He was a truly magnificent man, an incredibly powerful yet gentle ally with a strong sense of justice. I aim to one day be half the hero he was. If you truly are Lord Rei's daughter, then what your dear husband said about Lord Merkalt must be true." Seemingly trusting of their story, Shaer praised Luina's father as if he were a deity. Anima let out a sigh of relief while Shaer bowed her head before him. "Lord Anima! In place of Lord Merkalt, perhaps you would consider helping

us with our mission to subdue that monster?”

“What monster?”

Shaer began sharing information in a grave tone. Apparently, some monster occupied the bridge between two parts of Raiten: an important port town where most of Raiten’s imports and exports were focused, and the rest of the country. The bridge served as an essential trade route, but since it had been seized by the monster, the transportation of goods had been halted. The only choice merchants had was to take a detour, which took significantly longer.

“That monster’s actions affect the kingdom at large. It is the Knights’ duty to deal with such adversities, but… it is simply too powerful.” Shaer glanced at Anima with pleading eyes. “That’s where you, Lord Anima, come into play. Naturally, I don’t ask you to do it for free. The palace has put a bounty of fifty gold on the creature’s head.”

“F-Fifty gold?!”



Myuke's cry echoed through the room. Fifty gold coins was ten times what they'd made selling the golem stone. People worked for decades in hopes of making such a fortune, and it would allow their family to live a life of luxury for the foreseeable future.

"I won't do it."

Not even that large a sum of money was enough to get Anima to accept. There was something else, something much more important that he wanted to provide for his family.

"If you find that bounty unsatisfactory, I shall negotiate a price with His Majesty."

"Can you arrange something like that?"

"I report directly to His Majesty, and am therefore able to have an audience with him," Shaer boasted. "How much would you desire for this mission?"

"I don't want money."

"No? Then may I ask what it is you seek?"

"A peaceful life."

"I see." Shaer nodded deeply. "In other words, you'd like to be pardoned after your unlucky encounter with Lord Merkalt."

"That's correct."

Voiding the repercussions of his fight with Malshan was essential for a peaceful life with his family.

"Rest assured, Lord Anima. Once you defeat the monster and restore peace to our lands, His Majesty will surely pardon you for that incident."

"Then it's settled," Anima said in response to Shaer's confident statement. "I'll help you. So, where exactly is that bridge? Is it far away?"

"There's a sizable mountain between here and the bridge. If we decide to go around it, we should arrive at the bridge in about ten days. Using a stone that allows for flight would shorten the trip to three days. Either way, we don't have time to spare. I'll guide you there, so please, prepare to leave as soon as

possible!”

“Daddy’s leaving?”

Anima nodded to Marie’s question.

“For work. But don’t worry, I’ll be back soon. Can you help Mommy while I’m out?”

“No!”

She clung onto Anima’s legs.

“I wanna gooo! I wanna be witchu!” Marie sniffled on the verge of tears.

“I also want to be with you,” Anima said as he pet her head, “and I don’t want to leave Myuke and Luina behind either. Shaer, is there a town near the bridge?”

“There’s a trade city only a few hours’ walk away.”

Anima smiled with delight and glanced at Luina. While he took care of the monster, the girls could go shopping or hang out in the town at a safe distance from the battlefield.

“Say, Luina. How about we go on a trip?”

“A trip?”

“A honeymoon, if you’d like.” Anima turned his attention to his daughters. “Of course, I’d like to bring you two along too.”

“Sounds like a blast! I’m all for it!”

“Me too! I wanna go on a twip!”

Seeing her children get so excited, Luina got hooked on the idea too.

“Okay, let’s all go on a trip together.”

Though Anima would have to do a bit of work on the side, he and his beloved family set off on their honeymoon.

Chapter Two: The Demon Lord Takes His Family on a Trip

Shortly after they decided to go on a honeymoon, Anima and his family visited Garaat one last time before setting out on their trip. According to Shaer, it would take about ten days to reach the town close to the bridge, and once they'd completed their mission, the plan was to visit the royal capital. There, Shaer would take Anima and give her report to the king, using their audience to settle the Malshan case as well.

Shaer had told the family that the king, while fair, was rather strict, so their meeting could go one of two ways. It was possible that Anima and his family would end up facing prison time for hurting Malshan, leading the Scarlett family's status as heroes to come to an unfortunate, abrupt end. To minimize Luina's involvement, Anima decided to go alone. The other, much more favorable outcome was for the king to recognize Anima's abilities and pardon his crime of hurting Malshan.

They had only met Shaer a couple hours prior, but her respect toward the Scarlett family was clear. The chances that she would lead Anima into a trap by inviting him to the capital were virtually non-existent. It was much more likely that she was working hard to help Anima live the peaceful life he so desired.

Their unlikely helper wasn't currently with the four, however. After they had finished discussing their trip, she was overcome by a strong wave of exhaustion and left for Garaat before the others. She was probably already asleep at an inn. They agreed to meet at the town gates the next morning, so in the meantime, Anima and the others had some shopping to do for the journey that awaited them.

"Should we buy food first?" Anima asked, to which Luina nodded.

"It takes about four days to get to the nearest town, so I think we should buy enough food for five."

“It has to be food that will last a while, too.”

Anima was able to feast on poisonous demons, so eating some rotten meat wouldn’t have been an issue for him, but Luina and the kids weren’t so resilient. They had to avoid buying anything that could make them sick along the way.

“Daddy! Daddy!”

While walking through the main street looking for a place to buy food, Marie suddenly tugged on Anima’s hand.

“Yes?”

“Daddy look! I wannit!”

She pointed at a little girl of around the same age as Myuke. The girl, walking with her family, was wearing an adorable backpack.

“What do you think, Luina?” Anima asked. He’d have bought a backpack or two for his lovely daughter any day of the week if it made her happy, but having Marie carry her things by herself would only put a burden on her shoulders. He wasn’t sure if letting her carry things on such a long trip was the best idea.

“Hmm… Sure, let’s buy one for her. Carrying her own luggage will help make her feel more independent.”

“‘More independent’…” Anima muttered before falling silent, his eyes glossed over.

“Are you okay?”

“One day, Marie will start a life of her own…”

“You don’t have to worry about that yet,” Luina chuckled. “She’s still little.”

“That’s true, but it’ll happen one day…”

Sadness overtook Anima at the thought of marrying Marie off to someone.

“You’re such a worrywart. What’re you gonna do when I get married if you’re so protective of Marie? You know she’s only three, right?” Myuke said teasingly.

“Myuke, married…”

Anima’s resilience knew no bounds, yet the thought of Myuke getting married

off hurt him like nothing had ever hurt him before. He couldn't imagine the bustling house at the edge of town without her. He would never get in the way of his daughter's happiness, but imagining the day when Myuke left the house almost made him tear up. Seeing the dread well up in Anima's eyes, Myuke started to panic.

"Y-You're getting too upset about this! I never said I'd leave our home, so just relax! C'mon, cheer up!"

"R-Really?"

"Really really. I love you, Daddy, and I never want to leave your side. We'll always be together!"

"Myuke… Me too, Myuke! I love you too!"

"I love you too, Myuke," Luina added.

"I love Myukey too!"

They all gathered around Myuke and hugged her.

"A-All right, all right, I get it! Get off of me already! It's embarrassing!" Noticing the looks shot their way from passersby, including other kids around the same age as her, she was getting flushed. So, she tried to change the topic. "So, are we buying a backpack or what?"

"I think we should. Let's buy one for everyone."

"For real? I can get one too?"

"Of course." Hearing that, Myuke's mouth curled up into a smile and her eyes shone with excitement. She had probably wanted a backpack for herself all along, but as proven when they'd bought clothes, she was always reserved about her desires. "So, where can we buy backpacks?"

"There! I saw them earlier!"

Following Myuke, they made their way to a backpack store. The trendy little shop had a wide variety of bags on display, with different sections for both children and adults. They decided to go to the kids' section first.

"Wooow! So many! Ah! Bun-bun!" Marie ran off with stars in her eyes the

moment she spotted a bunny-shaped backpack. Made from a fluffy fabric, it was almost like a plush toy. The ear-to-ear smile she wore when she picked it up and hugged it tightly was to die for. “Soooft!”

“It looks like a plushie. Do you want that one?”

“Uh-huh! I wannit! I wanna be like a bun-bun!”

“I’m happy you found a cute backpack,” Luina giggled as she watched Marie bounce up and down, the bag held tightly in her arms. “How about you, Myuke? Have you found one you like yet?”

“Hmm… Can I look around a little more?”

“Of course. I’ll take Marie and help Anima find what he’s looking for.”

The two split off from Myuke and went to the adults’ section. Anima was planning to carry Luina’s luggage as well, so he was looking for something big.

“How about this one?” Luina asked as she picked up a large, sturdy-looking backpack. It looked like it would have no trouble surviving a yank or two.

“I’ll treasure it.”

Anima promised to take good care of the bag Luina had picked out for him, then the three of them made their way back to Myuke, who just picked out one for herself. It was a plain, peach-colored backpack that complemented her beautiful red hair very nicely. It was sure to look great on her.

“I like this one.”

“Good!” Anima cheered. “Is that everything? Let’s head to the counter and pay.”

After paying for their items, the family of four left the shop. The girls quickly put on their brand-new backpacks and walked the streets of Garaat at a brisk pace, excited for the coming trip.

“Say, can I put some food into my backpack once we’re finished shopping?” Myuke asked. “I kinda want to get a feel for it.”

“Me too! Me too!”

“Of course,” Luina said, “but we’re going to buy a tent first. We wouldn’t want

anyone to catch a cold from sleeping under the stars."

"There's no need for that," Anima told her. "I'll just make one with magic."

"You can do that?" Luina asked, tilting her head in surprise.

"Yes. I can use earth and fire magic, so by bending the earth to my will, I can build us a sturdy house."

"That's incredible. You're always so helpful whenever we need anything."

"It's my pleasure. But still, sleeping on the bare ground will be too cold. Maybe we should grab some towels and picnic blankets."

"We have towels, so we only have to get the blankets."

After Anima nodded, Luina changed directions to guide them to the appropriate store.

"Do you know where we can buy some?" he asked.

"Mm-hmm. I remember a place my dad brought me to buy a picnic blanket when I was around the same age as Marie."

A warm smile appeared on Luina's face as she recalled a sweet memory from her childhood. Anima tightly squeezed her hand and turned to face her.

"We'll make this trip just as memorable," he promised with the utmost confidence.

"We will."

Luina smiled all the way to the store, where they bought a picnic blanket big enough for the four of them to sleep on. After that, they returned to the main street of Garaat. Ignoring the enthusiastic and enticing offers of the stores dotting the main street, they bought only the bread, dried meat, and cheese that they needed. After wrapping it all in paper, they put the food into Myuke's and Marie's backpacks and continued their journey down the paved street.

"What else do we need?" Anima asked.

"Some dried fruit, maybe?" Luina suggested. "It would make for good snacks for the girls."

"Smacks? Smaaacks! I love smacks! They're sooo yummy!"

“Be careful not to trip, Marie. Stay with me and hold my hand while we’re shopping, okay?”

“’Kaaay!”

Hearing the magic word got Marie excited. She rushed ahead, but Luina quickly caught her by the hand. Anima was holding Myuke’s hand, and they all peacefully made their way to the fruit stall.

“Well, I’ll be. If it isn’t Luina!”

As they arrived at the stall with a wonderful display of various bright fruits set out, a well-built woman welcomed them, waving enthusiastically. The woman was the same person who had proposed the couple’s impromptu marriage celebration three months earlier.

“Are you out with your husband again? I see you’re still head over heels for each other!”

“Do you really think so?”

The lady confidently nodded at Anima’s question.

“I’ve been at this stall for thirty years. I’ve seen countless couples come and go, but I’ve never seen any of them radiate such passion and love for each other! You can’t fool my eyes! I can see you whispering sweet nothings into each other’s ears on the bustling streets! I’m sure you’re even more daring when you’re alone at home, aren’t you?”

“Oh, we are. Isn’t that right, Luina?”

“W-Well, it is, but you didn’t have to tell her… It’s embarrassing…”

The lady chuckled as she watched Luina uncomfortably fidget while her face flushed bright-red.

“Ah, I still remember you trotting all over the place with your little legs,” the lady chuckled as she watched Luina fidget uncomfortably while her face flushed bright red. “But just look at you now, getting all flustered. You’d better watch out; your little girls will fall in love before you know it!”

“…”

“Goodness, what’s with the sour look?”

The lady was caught off-guard by Anima’s silence. Myuke let out a tired sigh and shrugged her shoulders.

“He got bummed out earlier ’cause he started thinking about how me and Marie will get married.”

“Hehe, is that so? It’s no wonder—he loves you two little angels a whole lot.” Smiling as she commented on Anima’s devotion to his family, the woman’s eyes caught on the girls’ backs. “Well, look at those. Are you going on a trip?”

“A loooong trip!”

“My goodness, how nice.”

“Uh-huh! You know, Daddy buyed this! It’s a bun-bun!”

“What an adorable backpack. It looks great on you!”

“Daddy, hear that? My packpack’s ’dorbable!”

“You’re just as adorable,” Anima said while petting Marie’s head.

While they were chatting, Luina was browsing the display. She picked out a jar filled with various fruits as if it were a transparent pot of gold. Seeing that, Marie’s eyes lit up.

“Nummies!”

“Our dried fruits are really tasty. We don’t add any sugar, but they’re still packed with flavor and sweetness! Try one! You too, Myuke! Here!”

She gave each of the girls a piece of dried fruit. The moment they bit into them, their eyes popped wide open.

“Mmm!”

“It’s so sweet!”

After quickly chewing their way through the fruit, they began staring at the jar Luina was holding, virtually drooling.

“This is for the trip,” she told them with a chuckle, then hid it in Anima’s backpack. “You’ll get more tomorrow.”

“I wanna go already!”

“Me too!”

The girls’ excited voices mixed in with the bustle of the streets of Garaat. Seeing their enthusiastic smiles, Anima was reassured that suggesting a family trip was a fantastic idea.

◆◆◆

“Lessgooooo!”

The next morning, Anima and his family were ready to set out on their honeymoon under the gentle, warm sunlight.

“I’ve been waiting for you!”

After meeting up with Shaer at the town gate, they geared up and began their journey. Walking out of the town, they were greeted by flat plains as far as the eye could see. To the south, a mountain range looked over the road, adding a bit of variety to the landscape, while the scenery to the north was hidden by a lush forest. Anima had planned for them to take breaks every so often, but the wonderful sights really put them in the walking spirit, so they forged onward.

“Woooow! Mommy! Mommy, look! So geen!”

“Goodness, you’re right!” Marie was fascinated, so Luina played along. “It really is.”

“There too! Issall geen!”

“Incredible. It’s like everything around us is green.”

“Is ousside all geen? But, but, but I like red, too! And bue and white!”

Red, blue, and white. Those were Myuke’s, Luina’s, and Anima’s hair colors.

“Look up! You can see blue in the sky!”

“Wooow! It’s bue! And white too!”

“Mm-hmm, the clouds are white.”

“Red…” After circling around for a bit in hopes of finding the one missing color, she gave up and hung her head. “No red…”

“Hmm, doesn’t look like it. But I’m sure we’ll find red once we walk far enough down this road.”

“Yaaay! I love red!”

Luina was referring to the sunset, but Marie wanted to find something red as soon as possible, so she let go of Luina’s hand and ran ahead. Watching her do so, Myuke flashed a wry smile.

“You won’t last long if you start running around this early.”

“I will!”

Marie looked around curiously, then set off with her tiny legs. Her excitement wasn’t all that surprising; it was her first time outside of Garaat, after all. She was surrounded by sights she had never seen before, and things she was yet to experience. She was having the time of her life.

Her excitement had begun long before they’d left, though. She had been tapping away at Anima’s cheeks to wake him up, begging to start the trip just a minute earlier, since the moment the sun peeked over the horizon. That being said, Marie was not the only one enjoying the trip.

“Hey, you’ll trip if you don’t watch where you’re going! C’mere, let me hold your hand.”

Myuke held Marie’s hand and walked next to her, their brand new backpacks swaying with every step.

“Ah! She’s fying!” Marie pointed up at the sky where Shaer was flying ahead.

Hearing the little girl’s cheerful voice, Shaer waved at the small girl. She was to guide them all the way to the capital, but that didn’t mean she would be walking alongside them. She was a kind and understanding girl, and made sure not to be in the way of the peaceful family’s fun little trip.

“I’m so glad we have such pleasant weather.” Luina said as she intertwined her fingers with Anima’s. They looked at each other and shared a loving smile.

“I’m sure the girls would be having a great time even if it were pouring,” Anima said, watching his two daughters gleefully walk ahead, hand in hand. A simple rain wouldn’t have been enough to dampen their spirits.

“It’s no wonder. They were so excited about this trip that Myuke barely slept and Marie fell asleep hugging her backpack. I want to make this a wonderful family trip that they’ll always remember.”

“I’ll make sure that they have fun, but the same goes for you. Tell me if there’s anything you want to do during the trip.”

“You’ve already turned this into the most wonderful trip I could have ever dreamt of.”

“How so? I haven’t done anything yet.”

Luina let go of his hand for a second before embracing his arm with her whole upper body. His mouth curled into a smile as Luina’s soft breasts gently pressed against him.

“Just being with you on this trip makes me the happiest girl in the whole wide world.”



Seeing the pure joy radiating from Luina's face, Anima was worried that her jaw would fall off from smiling so much.

"I'm really happy to hear that, but I want to make you even happier. Instead of just walking around, let's enjoy this trip to the fullest!"

"I can't wait to see what surprises you have in store for me." Her pure, blissful smile caused a slight disturbance to stir Anima's heart. Seeing that disturbance in his face, Luina shot a worried glance at him. "Are you okay?"

"Well… I'm worried about whether I'll be able to make this special for you." To put it bluntly, Anima was unbearably nervous. Luina tugged him closer and hugged his arm tighter, making his heart race even faster. "Why are you squeezing so tightly?"

"I just feel like clinging to you. Because… I fell even more in love with you."

"Did I say something that made you do that?"

He was overjoyed, but he had to ask anyway. In response, Luina looked up at him with the warmest, most longing look Anima had ever seen in her beautiful eyes.

"Nothing in particular. But I can hear how much you love me in the way you talk."

Her gentle words tickled Anima's cheeks as she rested her head on his shoulder. The sweet scent that drifted off of her mixed together with the fresh fragrance of the lush plains, creating an image of a field full of budding flowers in his mind. All he wanted was to share a warm kiss with his lovely wife, but doing so while walking was a disaster waiting to happen.

I can wait until tonight to kiss her.

They had shared a kiss every day since their first, so he had already gotten used to that routine, but he couldn't risk hurting her. Anima stifled his desires and continued to walk next to Luina. Just as the sun finished its slow climb all the way up over the family's heads, they decided to take a small break.

"Wooow!" Marie shouted in excitement as they came upon a sea of blooming golden flowers.

“Oh my, what a beautiful field of dandelions.”

“Dadelins! So pitty!”

“They sure are,” Myuke agreed. “I wonder if someone planted them.”

“Dandelion seeds are connected to little white balls of fluff that can be carried far, far away by the wind. I think this field is probably natural,” Luina explained.

“Woooow! Dadelins’re so good!”

“Do you like dandelions, Marie?”

“Uh-huh! They sooo pitty!”

Marie watched the dandelions wobble in the gentle breeze, completely awestruck. Suddenly, Myuke clapped her hands together.

“Marie, do you want a flower crown?” she asked.

“You make one? I wannit! I wannit!”

“Coming right up!”

“Yay!” Marie cheered as she jumped with joy. “Cown! Cown!”

“Why don’t we have lunch here too?” Luina suggested.

“’Kay!”

“Sounds good to me! I’m starving!”

“All right, give me a moment to set up the blanket.”

Anima laid out the picnic blanket and took off his backpack. As he did so, Shaer landed next to him.

“Are you about to have lunch?”

“We are. Would you like to join us?”

“No, I wouldn’t want to ruin your precious family picnic. Besides… I hate to admit it, but I’ve already had lunch.” She had probably eaten her lunch in the air, as evidenced by the crumbs dotting her cheeks. When Anima pointed it out, she blushed, quickly wiped them off, and looked back at them with a stiff expression. “I’ll take a break a bit further away, just call for me when you’re done.”

“’Kaaay!”

“What a lively response.”

Shaer praised Marie before moving to the other side of the road. As she did, the girls shifted their focus to their lunch. The moment Luina opened the picnic basket, their spirited cheers travelled through the plains.

“Nummy!” Marie complimented the sandwiches Luina had woken up early to make.

“These sandwiches won’t last as leftovers, so eat them all up!”

“Don’t worry, I was already planning to do that.”

Anima loved Luina’s cooking; there was no way he was going to leave even a single bite uneaten. If anything, he had to be careful not to accidentally devour the girls’ portions as well.

“Thanks for the meeeaaal!”

The others did the same, then they all started eating. To prevent the girls from getting bored of them, Luina had made a plethora of different sandwiches —the one Anima picked up was ham, lettuce, and tomato. The lettuce crunched as he bit into it, and the saltiness of the ham was perfectly balanced out by the slight acidity of the tomato. The freshness of the ripe vegetables completely overtook his palate.

“Seconds!”

“More for me, too!”

They had to have been starving after walking all day; the large, well-packed sandwiches were almost completely gone in mere minutes.

“Be careful not to choke.”

“I know! So, anyway, where are we going today?” Myuke asked, her eyes twinkling as she stuffed her cheeks with one of Luina’s delicious sandwiches. Anima took out the map and pointed at the day’s goal just as she swallowed.

“We don’t have any set plans,” he explained, “but we want to reach the next city in five days. If we split the distance into five parts, we should stop around

here for the day.”

“It’s that close? That should be a cinch to reach by the evening!”

“You two were moving pretty fast this morning, after all.”

“I can’t wait to see all the cool things they’ve got out there!”

“Myukeyyy, you neber been here?”

“I’ve been around there for work, but it’ll be completely different this time around.”

Just thinking about the fact that Myuke was a Hunter almost made Anima throw up. He recalled the jerks who had bad-mouthed her at the top of their lungs, saying all kinds of horrible things. Those pigs had called her useless and bragged about using her as a pack mule, forcing her tiny body to haul all their luggage. He could imagine her dragging their clothes and equipment around all day, dead tired, her head hanging. She must not have had the luxury of getting to enjoy the scenery.

“I’m excited to get to our destination, but it’s nice to be able to relax here for a while,” Anima chuckled. “We’re not in any hurry. You can run and play around all you want after lunch.”

Their faces lit up in an instant and they continued stuffing their cheeks with sandwiches. Before long, the lunch basket was completely empty.

“I’m still hungy!”

Marie looked at Luina, asking for more food.

“Do you want to have dessert?”

“Uh-huh!”

“You mean the dried fruit, right? I want some too!”

The girls excitedly followed Luina’s hand as she reached into her bag, took out the jar of dried fruit, and opened it.

“Eating too much will make your tummies ache, so you can each have three!”

“Twee? But, but, I’m so hungy…”

“Then let’s make it four.”

“Four? Yaaay!” Marie cheered before jumping hand-first into the jar of sweets. At least she had planned to. As she took a closer look at the jar, she realized that there were multiple different kinds of fruit, and got very confused.

“These!” Myuke, on the other hand, immediately picked out her four and ate one. “So good!”

“Me too! I wannit too!”

Marie was getting restless. Feeling like she was wasting her time thinking, she stuck her small hand into the jar and took out four pieces of dried fruit. She then chose one of the four and tasted it.

“Wooow! Shoo shweet! Whassis?”

“That’s a mango.”

“I love mandoes! Myukey, Myukey, do you like mandoes?”

“I do!”

“I gibe you one!”

“Really?”

“Mm-hmm! ’Cause I love Myukey more than mandoes!”

“Thank you! Here, I’ll give you a strawberry for it.”

“Yaaay! I love stawberbies!”

While excitedly bonding over the delicious dried fruit, they each scarfed down their four pieces. After thanking Luina, Myuke stood up, and Marie followed suit.

“Time to make you a flower crown, just like I promised.”

“Yaaay! Thanks!”

Anima watched as Myuke began making the flower crown from the surrounding dandelions. Marie supervised the process, watching with great interest.

“Are you tired?” Luina asked, snuggling up to Anima.

“Don’t worry about me, I’m pretty confident in my stamina. I traversed the world on foot, and even crossed the infamous Desert of Perish once before you summoned me here.”

“I see…” Luina let out a disappointed sigh.

“Sorry,” Anima replied, seemingly worried.

“Hm? What are you apologizing for?”

“I fear my stories might be boring you.”

“Oh, no, not at all! It’s just, umm…” Luina fidgeted, staring at Anima with pleading eyes. “I was thinking about letting you rest your head on my lap if you were tired…”

“Your l-l-lap?! As a pillow?!”

Anima was thunderstruck. They’d done plenty of couple-like things such as holding hands, hugging, and sharing kisses, but she had never offered to let him use her lap as a pillow before.

He had watched as Marie enjoyed resting on Luina’s lap a number of times before. He didn’t want to admit it, but he felt a bit jealous every time that happened. Even so, he couldn’t bring himself to ask Marie to trade places with him. That, coupled with the feeling of awkwardness at directly asking Luina to pamper him, left him cursed to a life devoid of a lap to lie on. Being blessed with the wonder of resting his head on his wife’s lap took his breath away.

“Are you okay?”

Anima huffed and shook his head.

“I would love that.”

“Then please, go ahead.”

Luina sat down and patted her legs. After a big gulp, Anima carefully laid his head down on her thighs, taking extra care not to stab her with his horns.

Her thighs were like the fluffiest of clouds, and his head was floating on them. Their warmth and softness left him overcome with drowsiness, but he had finally gotten to experience the lap pillow he so deeply coveted, and he wasn’t

going to let it go to waste by falling asleep.

“How is it?”

“Incredible.”

“I’m happy to hear that,” Luina said with a smile upon hearing his heartfelt praise. “I’ll keep an eye on the girls, so feel free to take a nap.”

“I don’t want to fall asleep and miss out on this wonderful experience. I’ll stay up.”

“If you’re enjoying my lap that much, I’ll do this for you every day.”

“I appreciate the offer, but your lap would get tired if we did it every day.”

“You’re always so kind,” Luina told him as she ran her hand through his silver hair.

“No, I’m really not. I just love you.”

“Anima…”

Anima watched as a gentle smile spread across Luina’s face, when Myuke’s voice suddenly cut through the serene atmosphere.

“It’s done!”

Marie was making her way toward the couple with a dandelion crown sitting proudly atop her head.

“Oh my, what a beautiful crown. You’re like a real princess.”

“Myukey maked it!”

“Impressive, Myuke. Great work.”

“Wow, you’re very good at that.”

Myuke blushed from all the praise she got. While she was busy trying to cope with the sudden compliments, the others watched as a butterfly slowly landed on her head.

“Ah! Buttafye!”

“Really? Where?”

The butterfly took to the skies again as Myuke turned around.

“Wait, buttafye! Wait!”

“Wait!”

Anima watched from the comfort of Luina’s lap as the girls chased the butterfly around. After a while, they both returned to Anima and Luina with their bangs stuck to their forehead.

“Water… Can I have some water?”

“Me too!”

“Just a moment,” Luina said. Ushering Anima’s head off her lap so she could move around freely, she grabbed their water container and handed it to Myuke. After taking a couple big gulps, Myuke let out a satisfied “Ahh” and threw herself down on the picnic blanket.

“I need a quick break,” she said.

“Me too!”

“Then how about resting your head in my lap?” Luina offered.

“My lap is available, too.”

They both jumped on the proposal. Myuke leapt into Anima’s lap after shooting a quick glance at Shaer, and Marie snuggled into Luina’s.

“Wow, Daddy. Your legs are super ripped.”

“I’ve done a lot of training. Are they uncomfortable?”

“No, I love how they look and feel. They’re so cool!” Myuke often made a point of acting like an adult, but that was only in front of strangers. When she was together with her beloved family and no one else—save for Shaer—she would let herself be pampered like a little child. She flashed Anima a big, bright smile while he gently pet her head. “Thank you, Daddy. I’m really happy.”

“Me too!” Marie shouted. “I wanna get pets too!”

“Of course.”

Luina started patting Marie’s head, and before long, the two girls closed their

eyes and fell asleep. Watching her two little angels peacefully sleep on her and her husband's laps, Luina couldn't help but to smile.

"They're fast asleep."

"It's no wonder. They were on their feet all morning."

They stared at the emerald-green field while patting the adorable little girls sleeping in their laps. Time slowly trickled down as one hour turned into two, two into three…

"Oh, curse my luck! I overslept!" Shaer's eyes flew open and she jumped to her feet, looking around in panic. She calmed down the moment she spotted Anima, and begrudgingly approached him. "Were you stuck waiting for me? … Ah, I see the children are sleeping too."

"They are. I'd hate to wake them, and the sun has almost set. Why don't we end today's trip here?"

"After only half a day…"

Shaer looked troubled. She must've wanted to defeat the monster as soon as possible. Taking another look at the peacefully sleeping little girls, she nodded. "You're right, though; it *would* be mean to wake them. In that case, I'll start setting up my tent. I wouldn't mind setting yours up as well, but… Where is it?"

"We didn't bring one."

"Really? I believe it will get quite cold during the night. It might get a bit cramped, but please, use my tent."

"Don't worry about us. I'm going to build a house."

"A house?" Shaer asked with an inquisitive look.

"Ah, speaking of which, could you switch places with me for a moment?"

"M-Me? It's difficult to admit, but as I was quite young when I first devoted myself to the way of sword, I'm quite inexperienced with handling children on top of being absolutely terrible at any and all kinds of chores."

"It's okay," Luina assured her, "the girls love you. I'm sure you'll do just fine."

"I-I'll certainly try, then."

The encouragement from Luina built Shaer's confidence. She held her breath to avoid making any sound, and carefully lifted Myuke's small head, setting it down on her lap. Her awkward, flustered demeanor reminded Anima of himself from three months earlier.

"Thank goodness. She's sleeping like a baby," she said with a relieved sigh. "By the way, how are you planning to build a house? I don't see any trees nearby."

After getting over the shock of having her lap become Myuke's pillow, she was finally able to ask the question she'd been curious about. Anima signaled her to stay where she was and watch, then moved away from the group. He put his hand on the ground and focused his mana into it. When he did, the ground before him turned over, quickly forming into a recognizable shape.

He had succeeded in making a dome-shaped house. The arched doorway led into a single, wide area. The building's walls were coated with mana to make the structure incredibly sturdy; even in the case of a strong earthquake, it wouldn't suffer a single crack. Moreover, the mana coating kept any trickling dust in check, making it a perfect sleeping area for the night.

"I really wanted to throw together a door and a couple of windows, but I don't have any wood on hand. I apologize; it might get a bit windy inside."

"A small breeze won't hurt," Luina told him, "and it'll be warm and cozy if we snuggle up together. Thank you for making such a lovely little house for us, Anima."

"I'm glad you like it," Anima said with a smile, then turned towards Shaer with a serious look. "Are demons common in this area?"

"No, not at all. Hunters often patrol these areas, as we're not terribly far from Garaat yet. Still, being cautious is always a good idea. One can never be too prepared."

"Then I'll probably seal the entrance when we go to sleep."

Of course, he'd be sure to leave enough of an opening to allow them to breathe.

"Nhh…" Marie moaned. They must've accidently woken her up. She rubbed

her eyes and sat up, then drowsily looked at the newly built house. The moment she spotted it, her eyes popped wide open, filled with wonder and awe. “House! Look, house!”

“Ngh, what’s with all the noise…? Wait, what’s up with that house?!” Myuke exclaimed in surprise.

“Anima made it.”

“Daddy did?! Wooow!”

“This is indeed very impressive. I assume you made use of a dwarf stone, but manipulating such an excessive amount of earth must have required an unbelievable amount of mana. Not to mention that you’re using a minotaur stone simultaneously. Your mana reserves must be truly bottomless.”

Shaer was thoroughly impressed. She hadn’t commented on Anima’s horns at any point prior, seemingly because she assumed they were the result of a magic stone rather than being his own. He could have told her about them, but if he did that, he would be forced to explain everything about himself—about how he had been summoned to her world, and about the power of the Scarletts’ hidden treasure. They trusted Shaer, but it was better not to tell her anything she didn’t need to know.

“We’ll be setting up camp here for the day, so go on inside.” He guided the girls inside, then, after packing up the picnic sheet, went inside as well. “Shaer, please come in.”

“May I?”

“Of course. You might catch a cold outside.”

“I am in your debt.”

Shaer took down her haphazardly set up tent and entered the soil-scented room.

“Sooo biiig!”

“Not even rain can stop us now!” Marie and Myuke ran excitedly around the room. They had just woken up, but it was nearing sunset; after a hearty dinner, they were sure to get sleepy again. “Oh, since Daddy set up the house, does

that mean we're done walking for the day?"

"Yep," Luina said with a nod. "Let's let Daddy relax for a bit while I make dinner. Would anyone like to help me prepare dinner?"

The girls' hands immediately shot into the air of the soil hut that echoed with cheerful laughter. As the sun slowly set behind it, the family's first day of travel came to an end.

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Three days had passed since Anima and his family had left Garaat. Soon after the sun began to peek over the horizon, the group set out from their camp at the foot of the mountain. Marie had wanted to sleep for a bit longer, but Anima had told her that it would be more fun if they started climbing early in the morning, so they had set off for a small settlement on the other side of the mountain that Shaer had told them about.

According to her, the place wasn't anything grand, but they could restock their supplies there. Given that they had already eaten half the food they'd brought with them, it was the perfect stopping point for the night.

"Is everyone doing okay?" Anima asked his family. "Just say the word and I'll give you a piggyback ride or carry you in my arms all the way to the top of the mountain."

"I keep cimb!"

Despite having acted like a little sleepyhead when she'd woken up, the excitement of her first climb filled Marie with energy.

"Good girl! You're doing a very good job! How about you, Myuke?"

"All good! I've climbed some hellish mountains for work, so this puny hill is nothing to me!"

"Such a strong girl," Anima said while gently petting her head. "And you, Luina?"

"I'm fine. My legwork is one of my strongest points," she chuckled, continuing to climb the mountain with ease.

Things wouldn't have been going so smoothly if they had been on a steep

animal trail, but the beaten mountain path they walked had a gentle, comfortable slope. Even with the occasional patch of weeds and sudden dip or rise in the road, it was a pretty safe climb overall.

No matter how safe it was, however, it was still a climb. The girls' stamina drained much faster than it had when they'd been walking the flat plains on the first day, and before long, wiping the sweat off their foreheads became a common occurrence. The trees blocked some of the relentless sunlight, but they didn't provide a perfect cover. The patches of sunlight shining through rapidly raised their body temperature.

"I've found a perfect little spot for a break!" Just after the sun had reached its apex and continued to move west, Shaer landed near the group and informed them of her findings. "Let's have lunch there."

"Good idea. We'll have lunch soon, girls. Just a little longer."

The girls nodded excitedly to Luina and continued their brisk climb until something came into view.

"Wooow!" Marie exclaimed.

Before them was a rope bridge around a hundred feet long, suspended over a rocky, sparkling clean mountain stream. Falling from that bridge would spell certain death for anyone except Anima. Being faced with the first challenge since their departure, Anima tensed up. He needed to escort his family to the opposite shore safely.

"Marie, hold my hand and don't let go while we're on the bridge."

"'Kaaay!"

Anima took Marie's hand, and faced the dangerous crossing. They carefully set foot on the bridge, which immediately started swaying.

"Wooow! It's goin' shaky shaky!" Finding it amusing, Marie started shaking the rope. The more the bridge swayed and creaked the more excited she got. "Aaand done!"

Marie was ecstatic as they safely arrived at the shore. At first, Anima was hell-bent on protecting her at all costs, but as they got closer to the other side, he

realized that it was pretty well built and that he had nothing to worry about.

“Did you have fun?” he asked once they’d made it across.

“Uh-huh! It goed shaky shaky! I wanna go ’gain!”

“Then do you want to go back with me to the others?”

“Yes peeease!”

They once again held hands and crossed the swaying bridge, only to be greeted by a deathly pale Myuke. Anima had a hunch as to the reason for her lack of color.

“Are you afraid?”

“N-Not at all…” she said, visibly shaking. She couldn’t admit to being scared in front of Marie, and Anima completely understood that. He flashed a warm smile before opening his mouth.

“You know, I’m afraid too,” he told her.

“Huh?” she replied, dumbfounded. “Afraid? You?”

“Yes. I was scared stiff when I crossed the bridge with Marie. My heart wouldn’t stop racing.”

“R-Really? W-Well, to be honest, I’m also a little, super tiny bit scared…”

“I see. Then could you hold my hand? I feel like I can conquer my fear if you’re there with me.”

“Okay! I’ll keep you safe!” Myuke exclaimed proudly with an enthusiastic nod, then squeezed Anima’s hand. Her palms were sweaty from the stress.

“Luina, you should hold Marie’s hand.”

“Of course. The bridge would sway too much if we all crossed at once, so we’ll go first, okay?”

Once Luina and Marie had crossed the bridge and waved back at them, Myuke whispered “I can do this” and took a step forward. With a painful creak, the bridge started swaying. Her shaking legs carried her one step after another until she and Anima safely reached the other side.

“That was pretty fun!” Myuke said with a big smile.

Overcoming such an obstacle seemed to have really helped her grow; the look in her eyes was much more mature than it had been before. Realizing—and being astonished at—how quickly children grow up, Anima pet her head.

“I only managed to cross that bridge because you were there for me. Thank you, Myuke.”

“You’re welcome! I’ll help you cross again whenever you want, just say the word!”

“I can always count on you.” Anima smiled.

“Ah, look, there! What’s there?!”

The area Marie was excitedly pointing toward was completely concealed from the opposite side by trees, but after crossing, the family had a clear view of a beautiful waterfall. It wasn’t too elevated, so the feeling of grandeur was mostly absent, but its breadth was quite impressive. The curtain of water streamed down without pause, its coldness reaching all the way to the group to banish the beads of sweat from their foreheads.

“Look! A rainbow!”

“Wooow!”

As the sunlight shone upon the waterfall, it produced a cute little rainbow. The view was so lovely that all five of them were left completely spellbound.

“How pretty…” Luina said in a serene tone, awestruck by the waterfall.

Anima turned toward her and experienced the same feeling of awe.

“Just gorgeous…”

“It really is, isn’t it? Wait, what are you looking at?!”

“You.”

“Ah, jeez. There you go again, flattering me…”

Luina’s face flushed and she turned back toward the waterfall. After gazing at the beautiful scenery for a little longer, they set out on their climb again.

“Aaand done!”

When they reached the top of the mountain, the family sat down at a group of benches prepared for the Hunters usually patrolling the area and enjoyed the scenery, so breathtaking that it couldn’t be described in words. The light of the setting sun painted the vast forests below them orange, as if they were dressed in autumn colors, while the cold, gentle breeze lessened the exhaustion that had set itself on their bodies after a long day of climbing. Taking in the view, a gentle smile appeared on Luina’s tired face.

“Ahhh! Look! There! A moundan!”

“Wow, there really is a mountain over there! Good find!”

“I’m sooo good at finding! That moundan is sooo biiig!”

“It really is big, but you know, you climbed an even bigger mountain today.”

“I did?!” Marie was blinking rapidly in surprise. “I cimbeded something bigger?”

“You sure did. Both of you did really well, Marie, Myuke.”

Hearing Anima’s praise, wonderful smiles bloomed on both of their faces, and they jumped up from the bench.

“I can cimb s’more!”

“I’m ready to roll too! Though, Marie, we won’t be climbing anymore. We need to go down the mountain now.”

“We go dowd?”

“Yep, exactly! Look, see that village down there?” Myuke pointed at the small settlement in the middle of the woods. “We want to get there!”

The orange sunshine reflected off the river running along the outskirts of the village. It seemed to be rather far away from the summit, but once they’d descended the mountain, the rest of the way would be through plains. The flat roads wouldn’t prove very difficult to walk for the girls, so even in the worst-case scenario, they would be able to make it there by the morning two days later.

“Wooow! Look, Daddy! Wassat?”

Marie excitedly pointed down. A small pond was letting off a gentle cloud of steam just under the slope, which could only mean one thing.

“Isn’t that a hot spring?”

“‘Hod sping’?”

“A bath.”

“One’s there?”

“Mm-hmm. Why don’t we all get in while we’ve got the chance?”

The girls nodded. They had worked up quite a sweat during the day-long climb, and naturally, they wanted to rinse it off—a feeling that even Myuke was old enough to be extra conscious of. Settling on the idea of a relaxing bath, they started descending the mountain when Shaer landed near them.

“It’s gotten rather dark, so I suggest we set camp for the night. Naturally, I’d prefer that we get to the monster as soon as possible, but I would hate to put your dear family in danger to do so. Therefore, rude as it may be for me to say, I forbid you from pushing your limits,” she warned out of the goodness of her heart.

“We go hod sping!”

Shaer was visibly puzzled by Marie’s brief report.

“‘Hod sping’…? Ah, a hot spring! So that’s where all that steam was coming from.”

“You come too!”

Marie took her hand. She was traveling separately, but she slept together with the rest of the group, and it seemed that Marie had really warmed up to her during their three-day sleepover. Anima also enjoyed her company, especially because she was mindful of his family.

“Would I be disturbing your family bonding?” she asked, and looked to Anima and Luina.

“I wouldn’t mind one bit if you joined us. The more the merrier, after all.”

“I don’t mind either.”

Marie really wanted to take a bath with Shaer, and Anima couldn’t possibly turn down his little angel’s wish. Their acceptance made Shaer’s face twinkle with happiness.

“To tell the truth, I really wanted to take a bath. I’m drenched in sweat.”

The knight’s inclusion decided, all five left for the hot spring together. As they got to the edge of the water, Marie immediately started undressing while Myuke looked at it with a worried expression.

“It’s steaming like crazy. Can we really get into this?” Myuke carefully checked the temperature with her hand, then flashed a relieved smile. “It’s perfect!”

Following Marie’s example, Myuke started stripping too. She was already old enough to be embarrassed about bathing with others, so despite having agreed to wash Anima’s back not long after they’d met, she still hadn’t gotten into the bath together with him. Still, watching Anima, Luina, and Marie merrily take their baths together must have made her feel left out, so a week after she’d started referring to Anima as “Daddy”, she’d finally given in and taken her first bath with them.

“So compy!”

“It’s nice and warm.”

Marie and Myuke quickly submerged themselves in the bath, followed shortly after by Anima and Luina, who were also stark naked.

“How relaxing…” Luina whispered with a gentle smile. The comfortable warmth had very obviously made her drowsier, as her eyes stayed closed longer every time she blinked.

“I feel like myself again.”

Shaer, in the nude like the others, enjoyed herself a little bit further to the side. It was supposed to be a rather embarrassing experience, but she either didn’t mind Anima’s company or was just too absorbed in enjoying the warm water, as she didn’t show any signs of embarrassment.

“Look, look! The wader’s so pitty!”

“It’s really beautiful how it reflects the setting sun.”

“I’m being revitalized…”

The family spent the rest of the evening revitalizing their bodies and minds at the dream-like hot spring.

Chapter Three: The Demon Lord Defeats a Monster

After enjoying the wondrous natural hot spring to the fullest, the family quickly went to bed, waking with the first rays of the sun. They ate a small breakfast while admiring the solemn view of the sunrise, then immediately set out to descend the mountain.

It didn't take long for them to descend the gentle slope. They reached the foot of the mountain by midday, and continued their travels on the crumbling road towards the small settlement, which they reached by sunset. They managed to restock their supplies just before the stores closed for the day, spent the night at a small inn, and left the village in the refreshing, still-cool morning.

Their next stop was the commercial city of Barjyo. To get there, they took a warm, sunny dirt road running through a number of fields, in between which they found deep, dense thickets, indicating a lack of any larger human settlements nearby. Each time they walked into one of the thickets, it was as if they had entered a cool, well-insulated house on a scorching summer day. The leaves blocked out most of the sunlight, making those parts of the trip much more enjoyable. Each gentle breeze rustled all the leaves and plants on the ground, turning nature into a grand orchestra.

They were nice places to spend some time at, but Anima had one worry: No matter how long they walked, the scenery didn't change at all. Sooner or later, the kids would grow tired of it, which would make them all groggy. Luckily for him, those fears proved completely baseless, as Marie was busy picking up the acorns that littered the side of the road while Myuke rode Anima's shoulders and picked various wild fruits. They would occasionally find a heart-shaped leaf on the ground, which was a special event in and of itself. Suffice to say, with all the activities available to them, there wasn't a moment of boredom.

As the night fell, they set up camp next to the road. The following two days passed in a similar fashion, but on the morning of the third day, the group

finally came to the end of what seemed to be an endless expanse of trees, bushes, and acorns. Instead of a dense forest, they found themselves on a neverending green plain. The scenery was similar to that of the very first day of their trip, so Anima assumed that the girls wouldn't be excited about it.

Much to his surprise—and delight—they were ecstatic; they seemed to have remembered the fun they'd had that day. Marie gleefully exclaimed that she loved red upon finding a red flower she hadn't seen before, and Myuke was left wondering if, somehow, she naturally attracted butterflies when another one landed on her head. As they continued their way through the plain, they came upon a small hill. The road led around it, but…

"I love cimb!"

"The view must be incredible from up there!"

At the girls' request, they decided to check out the view from the top.

"Wooow!"

"Amazing…"

Their eyes twinkled as they looked far off into the distance. They were completely enamoured with the view of the large city—twice if not three times the size of Garaat—that panned out right in front of them.

"At last. We'll arrive at Barjyo shortly," Shaer noted as she slowly descended next to the family while looking at the city with a profound expression.

Barjyo was surrounded by tall, thick-looking walls, presumably to keep the monsters out, but one could enter its premises from a number of different directions. With all the gates dotting the walls and all the roads connecting to it, the city almost looked like a pinwheel from the outside. One of those roads was sure to lead to the bridge occupied by the monster. The fact that they couldn't see the bridge from their vantage point meant that they must have been rather far from it.

Anima was confident in his strength, but he didn't have any valuable information on the monster's strength. He was prepared to fight tooth and nail to protect his peaceful family life… but that could wait one more day. More than anything else, he wanted to enjoy some time in Barjyo with his family.

“Let’s head down.”

They began descending the hill at Anima’s proposal, with Shaer walking at the front while they engaged in a lively chit-chat.

“Have you ever been to Barjyo, Luina?” Anima asked, as she was the only one who wasn’t visibly amazed by the spectacle.

“Once, twelve years ago.”

“With your family?”

“Yes. We started the orphanage three months after that, so our trip to Barjyo was our last trip together.”

“What did you do there?”

“Shopping, mostly. There are so many extraordinary things for sale in this city that simply exploring all the various stores made a full day go by in a flash.” Luina excitedly shared her experience in Barjyo, longingly recollecting her last family trip. “There were so many foods I’d never even seen, let alone eaten before! I actually asked Dad to let me try one. I expected an amazingly sweet candy, but it was sour as a lemon! Oh, but don’t get me wrong, it was really yummy!

“The marketplace is like a festival when it gets busy! The small shops get buried under the sea of people… I remember splitting off from my parents and getting lost there. I had been having such an amazing time, but that suddenly made me feel so small, fragile, and… alone. I broke down in tears. Then, one of the shop owners brought me cookies, and they were sooo delicious! I’ll never forget their taste!”

Anima listened to her stories with a gentle smile.

“Sounds like you had a lot of fun.”

“I did, but not only with the shopping. Fishing was a blast, too!”

“On the lake Shaer told us about?”

An entire district within Barjyo was occupied by a lake that, judging by its sheer size, no doubt had fish in it. Luina was vividly reliving her memory as a child-like smile spread across her face.

“Yes! Dad and I rented rods and went fishing together. He caught so many fish, but I didn’t do very well. Ah, but I did catch the very last fish all by myself! And it was the biggest one! I can still remember how triumphant and excited I felt, and the taste of that fish.”

Her lovely, warm smile didn’t fade in the slightest while she recounted her sweet childhood memory. She seemed to really treasure that trip. Anima’s goal as a father was to bless the girls with similarly unforgettable, fun experiences. His wish was to help them make memories they could tell with a longing smile to their own children once they grew up, got married, and started families of their own.

“All right then, what do you say we go to the market, then try fishing at the lake together?”

The girl’s eyes lit up with excitement. Luina’s stories must have moved them.

“You know, you know, I love fissies!”

“I’m hungry just thinking about it! Can’t wait to check out the market!”

Their excited voices filled the plain. They kept discussing all the things they wanted to do in the city while walking there, and before long, they arrived at the gates of the commercial city of Barjyo.

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The moment they took their first step through the gate and into the city, Myuke and Marie stopped dead in their tracks. They looked around with their breaths held and their eyes twinkling with amazement, stunned by the magnificent cityscape before them. The buildings towering far over them on both sides of the wide road, and the crowd, denser than any they had ever seen, amazed them to their core. Almost every building in Barjyo greatly overshadowed Garaat’s tallest building: its Hunter’s Guild.

“So tawl! Wooooow!”

“Seriously, just wow. Are these all Hunter’s Guilds?”

“No,” Shaer explained. “Most if not all of the buildings here are inns.”

“Inns? All of them?”

“Indeed. The buildings close to the gates are mostly inns used by travelers. In other words, the other gates are similarly surrounded by these sorts of tall buildings.”

“Wow, there are even more?” Myuke let out a deep sigh of admiration. “Well, that makes sense, I guess. This city is big on travelers and merchants, after all. Still, with so many of them, at least one of them’s gotta have a free room.”

“Unfortunately, that’s not always the case.”

“What do you mean? Are you saying that all the rooms get rented sometimes? Like, literally every room in all of these gigantic inns?!”

“Indeed, they do!”

Shaer seemed to have enjoyed Myuke’s awe-filled response, as she was getting excited about their discussion as well.

“Daddy’s pace’s good to seep!” Marie added. She probably meant that if they couldn’t get a room, Anima could just make another house for them to sleep in.

“Thank you, Marie. I’m really glad you like the houses I make.”

“I love them too, but I doubt they’ll just let us make a dirt house in the middle of the city. We’ll probably have to leave if the inns are full and we have to use your magic. Maybe we could walk to the nearest town?”

Myuke worriedly alternated her gaze between Anima and Luina. Given her excitement for the market and the fishing, leaving the city so early would have been devastating news for her.

“W-Worry not!” Feeling sorry for potentially letting Myuke down, the fidgeting Shaer opened her mouth and tried to calm her down in a soothing tone. “Not many people visit here from Garaat, so we shouldn’t have any issues with getting a room!”

Reassured, a huge smile appeared on Myuke’s face, followed by a sigh of relief from Shaer.

“Yaaay! But we can’t risk it! I wanna get a room before we explore!”

“Good idea,” Luina lauded. “We should set our luggage down and take a quick rest before we go to the market.”

The group entered a nearby inn and requested a room. Luckily, there were free ones, so the family rented a corner room on the fourth floor and Shaer got one of her own.

“Lord Anima, do you have a moment?” Shaer asked in a hushed tone. Judging from her expression, she must have wanted to talk about the monster. In response, Anima nodded.

“Go to the room. I’ll join you later.” He gave Luina the key then descended the stairs with Shaer until they found a corner they could talk at. “What did you want to talk about?”

“The monster.” Just as he’d thought. He nodded, urging her to start speaking. “During our short trip together, I had the pleasure of witnessing the harmonious, lovely relationship you’ve built with your family. Henceforth, I don’t believe you should face the monster.”

Her words caught Anima completely off guard.

“Why’s that?”

“I have no doubt in my mind that you defeated Lord Merkalt. However, even if you’re stronger than Lord Merkalt, there’s no guarantee you’ll defeat that monster and come out unscathed. I would never be able to face Lady Luina, Miss Myuke, and Miss Marie again if… anything were to happen to you.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t lose to that monster.” Anima assuaged her worries with a smile. “I’ll make sure to defeat it—not only for my own sake, but for yours as well.”

“F-For my sake?” Shaer’s eyes widened.

“Yes. I’ve taken a liking to you. You genuinely care for my family, and for that, I’ll defeat the monster that’s giving you trouble.”

Even if that weren’t the case, he needed to be deemed a person of high value if he wanted to be pardoned for what happened between him and Malshan. For that, he needed to rid the bridge of the monster terrorizing it. His confident, reassuring words dispelled all the doubt from Shaer’s eyes.

“Then just as we discussed, I’ll trust you with defeating that monstrosity.”

“Right. But, I’m going to spend today with my family. I’ll deal with that monster tomorrow, after sunrise.”

If he ran at full speed, he would reach the bridge in no time, giving him the opportunity to deal with the monster before his family woke up. Then, he could return to the inn and resume their honeymoon as though he’d never left.

“Understood! I’ll accompany you to the bridge. Please come to my room when you’re ready to depart.”

Anima nodded, then they each left for their own room. After a bit of walking down the carpeted hallway, he arrived back at his family.

“Daddy back!”

“Look, Daddy! A bunk bed! Me and Marie can have the top, right?”

His arrival was met with the excited cheers and sweet smiles of his girls.

“Of course you can.”

There was a bunk bed next to the wall, big enough to comfortably house four people. The room wasn’t overly spacious, but they were only planning to use it to sleep, so it didn’t bother them. The majority of their time during the day would be spent in the city.

Myuke and Marie climbed the ladder and, after setting their bags to the side, threw themselves on the bed to try it out. It must have been pretty comfy, as they stopped moving shortly after.

“We should get some rest too.”

“You’re right.”

With a faint blush on her face, Luina laid down, and Anima joined her shortly after. They were both lying on their backs, staring at the bottom of the bunk above them. Just as Anima glanced to his side, Luina did the same. Her cheeks turned an explosive pink color as their eyes met.

“This is the first time we’ve been all alone in the same bed…” she whispered joyfully, a hint of anxiety in her voice.

“It is. Are you nervous?”

“A little bit. But more than anything, I’m happy.” Luina turned toward Anima and snuggled up to him. The tips of their noses almost touched, and her sweet breath gently caressed his cheeks. “I’ve always wanted to fall asleep in your arms.”

“And I’ve always wanted to fall asleep holding you.”

He loved sleeping in the same bed with all three of them, but he’d always wanted to sleep alone with Luina, and that wish had at long last become a reality. Their tiny whispers faded, and they silently gazed into each other’s eyes until Luina slowly closed hers.

During their three months together, Anima had begun to understand women slightly better, and because of that, he knew exactly what Luina wanted from him. After taking a moment to appreciate her beauty, he planted a kiss on her glossy lips. It was their first kiss in a while, and they made sure to enjoy every single sweet moment of it to the fullest. When Anima finally pulled his head back, he was met with Luina’s slightly moist eyes.

“Are we done already?”

Enticed by her sweet voice, Anima planted another kiss on her soft, warm lips. The sweetness of their kiss permeated his mouth, making him long for more and more, but Luina quickly pulled away when she felt a bit of squirming from above. Moments later, Myuke and Marie descended the ladder.

“I wanna go into the city!”

“Sidy!”

“Th-That sounds good. Okay, let’s—Oww!”

As Luina jumped up from her bed, she hit her head on the bottom of the bunk above.

“We can switch beds if you want. You’ll have more privacy up there.”

“That’s okay, don’t worry about it,” she answered bashfully, blushing at Myuke’s snarky remark.



The four then left the room and set out to explore the city, relying on Luina's memory. She led the way, walking away from the inn, and they soon arrived at the main street. The spectacle before their eyes left them speechless. The number of people walking the main street was like nothing they'd ever seen before; if one wasn't paying attention, they could easily get separated from their loved ones in the crowd.

"Where martet?" Marie's sparkling eyes darted around the crowded street.

"It's this way."

"Daddy, Daddy! Issat way!"

She tightly grabbed Anima's hand and pointed in the direction Luina was facing. They carefully made their way toward the market, being extra careful not to bump into anyone, and before long, reached a big, open square.

They had arrived at the market, a place that, from the outside, seemed to be incredibly chaotic. Touting more stalls than one could reasonably visit in a day and even more customers clogging the pathways, it bustled with the sounds of people making purchases and stall owners shouting about their selection of goods to attract customers. Witnessing such pandemonium for the first time, they couldn't even begin to imagine the place without all of the stalls and people. Judging by the wheels on each stall, however, they were most likely rolled home by their owners when there were no customers around.

"I can't SEE!" Marie grumbled while Anima stared in amazement at the state of the market. She was stretching herself out, but couldn't see a thing due to the sea of people passing in front of her. The moment she caught the slightest glimpse of the stalls, her view got obstructed again.

"Here, let me help you."

A wonderful smile bloomed on her face as soon as Anima picked her up.

"Wooow! Wooow! Lots! Lotsa sops!"

"Mm-hmm. There's quite a lot of them."

"It's as busy as I remembered," Luina said with a nostalgic smile. Myuke, on the other hand, had an air of worry about her.

“We’ll totally be swept away by this crowd…”

“It’s okay. We’ll all be holding hands. Myuke, you hold Mommy’s other hand so no one gets lost.”

Anima linked his arm with Luina’s, which immediately dispelled Myuke’s fears. Holding her mommy’s hand, she stretched herself out.

“Hm? What’s over there?”

She immediately found something interesting, so the family set off toward a stall covered by a bamboo roof, cutting through the crowd. The merchant there was filling his tiny display with as many cupcake-like sweets as he could, their sweet scent enticing them as they got closer and closer.

“Nummy!”

“Yep, they look super yummy. And wow, this sweet smell! Think they’re cakes?”

“They look like cakes.”

“Heehee. These are actually aromatic candles,” Luina proudly revealed.

“Whassat?”

“They’re candles that smell nice when you light them.”

“Wow, really? There are candles like that? I had no idea!”

“No nummies?”

“They may smell delicious, but they’re really bitter.”

“H-How do you know that?”

“I mistook them for cakes and bit into one.”

“You must have been adorable as a child.” Anima had great fun imagining his beloved wife as a clumsy little girl. “Do you want to get one?”

“That’d be lovely. Which one should we buy?”

“See the one with the flowers on the glass? We should get that one!” Myuke suggested. “We can save the glass after the candle melts, too!”

“That’s a great idea. The glass will remind us of our trip.”

“Right?! Do you like it, Marie?”

“Uh-huh! ’Cause look, it’s red!”

Marie seemed to have also liked the rose-colored candle, so they decided to buy it. After paying, Myuke hugged the paper bag to her chest, overjoyed by their purchase. They began looking around for another interesting stall, when suddenly, their attention was caught by a chime.

“Did you hear something?” Anima inquired.

“I did!” Myuke replied. “It sounded so nice and—Ah, there it is again! Are they selling bells somewhere?”

“Heehee. That must be a wind chime,” Luina chimed in with a childlike smile she’d never worn before. Just seeing Luina’s carefree expression as she was brought back to her childhood had already made visiting Barjyo worthwhile for Anima.

“Lemme see jime!”

“I’m interested too; it’s been a long time since I’ve seen one. Let’s see… We heard it coming from there, didn’t we?”

Pulling Anima along, Luina took him and the girls to a stall with clean glasswork dangling from its top. It was as if a giant jellyfish had chosen the top of the stall to take a peaceful nap.

“Huh? How come it isn’t ringing now?” Myuke asked.

“They only chime when they get blown by the wind,” Luina explained.

“Fwhhh! Fwhhh!”

Marie tried to blow the chimes as best she could. As if responding to her desperate attempts, a gentle breeze blew through the market a moment later, allowing the wind chimes to play their beautiful melody.

“Wooow! So pitty!” Marie excitedly clapped with an adorable, innocent smile.

“Why don’t we get one?” Anima proposed. There was no way he could pass up on buying one after seeing his daughter’s genuine smile.

“Yaaay! Which, which?”

“Hmm… How about this one?”

Anima bought a blue chime—one that matched Luina’s hair color.

“Both the candle and this chime were pretty pricey… If we keep buying stuff like this, we’ll be broke by the end of the day.”

Myuke was right; both the candle and the chime had been surprisingly expensive. The prices had likely gone up after the monster occupied the bridge, as they had to jack up their prices to make sure they stayed profitable with their ability to restock threatened. Regardless of that, Anima knew he would regret being overly thrifty while on his honeymoon, so he had no plans to end his splurging.

“You don’t need to worry about money. More importantly, is there anything else you’d like to get?”

“I wanna take a proper look around first.”

They started browsing the market again. Between the novel pieces of clothing with interesting colors, the meticulously carved dolls, crazy, coiling candles, tropical juices, and utensils with elaborate pictures carved into them, they didn’t get a moment’s rest. By the time they managed to catch their breath, the sun had moved a considerable distance to the west. If they didn’t start getting ready to fish, they would have to give up on it for the day.

“Let’s buy one last thing and go fishing,” Anima suggested.

“That’s a good idea,” Luina said. “Do you want anything else, girls?”

Luina had expected them to be disoriented by all the things they’d perused in the past couple of hours, but Myuke responded almost instantly.

“I want that!”

“And, and, I wannit too!”

She and Marie had already made up their minds, and pointed at a stall selling various ornaments. What the girls wanted were the colorful embroidered bracelets they had there.

“Oh, these are wishing bracelets!” Luina pointed out as they walked up to the stall.

“Is that what they call these? I like them a lot; they’re so colorful!”

“Is this what you want, then?”

“Yep! I’ll take good care of it!”

“Heehee, you can take good care of it if you’d like, but wishing bracelets are meant to wear down until they break.”

Myuke took a step back.

“For real?”

“They say that when it falls off, your wish will come true. It has to fall off on its own, though; you can’t break it on purpose.”

“Wow, that’s incredible!” She was getting even more excited about buying one.

“All right, let’s get these.”

Anima bought four wishing bracelets, and everyone put them on their arms.

“Pease come tuuue!”

“What did you wish for, Marie?”

“I wanna gow up fast!”

“Really?” Anima asked. “You want to grow up quickly?”

“Uh-huh! ’Cause I wanna help you s’more!”

Anima wiped a single tear from the corner of his eye. He couldn’t handle Marie’s adorableness. He wanted to boast to the next person passing by how perfect his little daughter was.

“And you, Daddy? What did you wish for?”

“To be together with you guys forever and live happily ever after.”

“That’s what I wished for as well.”

“I wished for the same thing too!”

Luina and Myuke smiled at each other.

“Great! So, should we go back to our room for now?”

Their trip to the market was officially over. Difficult as it may have been, they parted ways with the bustling market of exotic wonders and made their way back to the inn to safely store their purchases. Then, they set out again.

“Where can we get fishing equipment?”

“If the store hasn’t moved, it should be right next to the lake.”

“We’re so lucky to have you with us, Luina. Otherwise we were sure to have gotten lost in the city.”

“I’m happy I could be of help. That being said, you always help me out, so…”

“Not at all. You’re the one helping me all the time. I can’t even begin to tell you how grateful I am that you always cook for me.”

“It’s only natural to cook for the person you love. Not to mention that you constantly make dinner with me. It’s such a big help.”

“Don’t even mention it. I’m glad I can spend more time with the love of my life.”

“Oh you…”

While continuing their lovey-dovey chit-chat, they made their way to the lake. Just as Luina had said, the fishing store was standing right on the shoreline. Her mouth curled into a warm, gentle smile as she spotted the same little shop that was etched ever so vividly into her memory.

“It’s still there…” she murmured.

“Is that the same one you visited as a child?”

“Yes. It hasn’t changed one bit. Could we rent our fishing gear there?”

“Of course. Right, girls?”

Their daughters nodded excitedly, though they probably didn’t care which store they rented the gear from and just wanted to start fishing as soon as possible. To that end, they entered the worn-down fishing store, where they found a wide variety of rods of every size, plenty of cups full of dirt and worms, countless bobbers, and more. Judging from Luina’s wonder-filled gaze, the inside must have been the same as she remembered it.

“Wow, it’s so light!” Myuke said, picking up a fishing rod while Anima was distracted by his wife’s lovely reaction.

“Wooow, liiight!”

“That rod’s made of bamboo, a durable plant that grows on the other side of the ocean. It’s really flexible, which makes it hard to break.”

“Commercial cities get stuff from all over the place, huh? Anyway, I’m getting this one.”

“Me!”

Marie picked up a small rod, specifically designed for kids.

“Be careful of the hook,” Anima warned.

“’Kaaay!”

“Let’s go, I wanna fish!”

“Give me just a moment.”

Anima was busy looking at the baits. He was used to seeing worms during the countless hours he and Luina spent working in the fields, but impaling live ones on a hook was a different story altogether. Instead, he decided to look for dough bait. After renting three adult and one children rods, two buckets, one net, then buying two packs of dough bait, they left for the fishing area.

As they made their way down the shoreline covered in short green grass, they found a handful of other people fishing there as well. There were a few benches, chairs, and tables around the area, and a big furnace to the side with clean, white smoke gently rising from the top. A group of men had just made a toast to their good catch at the table closest to the furnace.

Enjoying the bounties of the sea by frying the fish they’d caught themselves while right beside the water would be a memorable, fun experience for their whole family. Anima couldn’t wait to see his daughters’ excited smiles as they pulled their dinner from the crackling fire and enjoyed the fruits of their labor.

He attached the bait to his hook, then did so for Marie as well so she wouldn’t get hurt.

“Thank you!”

“You’re welcome. Are you set, Myuke?”

“Yep, all good! Look!”

“Well done.”

“Ehehe. Just watch; I’ll catch a bigger fish than you!”

Declaring confidence in her success, Myuke stood next to Luina and swung her rod. With a small *plop*, the hook sank into the lake. Anima and Luina also swung their rods and sank their hooks into the water, and while Marie imitated them, the only thing her hook sunk into was Anima’s robe.

“I catched Daddy!”

Anima flashed a warm smile as Marie hugged him tightly.

“Oh, look at that. I’ve been caught.”

“Wow, I think you won! We can’t possibly top that.”

“Hmm, but we can’t eat Daddy.”

Myuke and Luina chuckled as they joked about Marie’s catch.

“I wanna fissie!”

“Me too. We’re sure to catch something if we focus, okay?”

Anima pulled the hook out of his robe and Marie swung her rod again. With a *plop*, her hook sank into the water like the others’.

“Where the fissies?”

“They might come here if you call for them.”

“Come out, Midder Fissie! I’m here!” The water rippled as Marie’s cheerful voice reverberated across the lake. “There! You seed it?! It was there!”

Luina watched with a gentle smile as Marie jumped up and down in excitement.

“Mister Fishie came to say hello,” she said.

“It was huge! Here, I’ll catch it for—Whoa!” Myuke was suddenly pulled

forward, and her rod bent at a sharp angle. As she pulled back on it, the shape of a fish became visible under the surface. “I caught one! Daddy, quick! The net!”

Urged on by his daughter, Anima took the net and scooped up the fish that was struggling just below the water’s surface.

“Woo-hoo! I caught one!” Myuke cheered.

“Wooow, Myukey!”

“Very impressive.”

“Well done! You caught the first one!”

Myuke was elated by everyone’s praise. She proudly looked at the fish she’d caught, moved into a bucket for safekeeping.

“Hyanh!”

Suddenly, Marie’s fishing rod slipped from her hands and rapidly made its way toward the lake. Anima quickly picked it up and gave it back to Marie.

“Look, Marie! You caught something!”

“I did? Yaaay! Daddy, net!” Marie pulled back on her fishing rod while slowly walking backward. Soon enough, the fish became visible in the water, giving a chance to Anima to scoop it up with the net. “Midder Fissie!”

Marie held the wriggling fish she’d caught in her hands, the most radiant, adorable smile on her face. After securing their latest catch in the bucket, they all went back to fishing until the lake and the surrounding green lawn took on an orange hue.

“I’m hungy!” Marie complained.

“Me too. Maybe we should call it a day soon.”

“We caught so many of them.”

“Right?! I definitely didn’t expect to catch three!”

Their grand total came to eight. Myuke had caught three, Luina and Marie had each caught two, and Anima had finished with only a single catch. If he had to come up with an excuse for his performance, it was that he was busy helping

everyone out by catching their rods if they lost their grip on them and dragging the net around to scoop up the fish, but there was no need for that. He was just happy that he was able to help his family.

“Okeydokey, we should be all set for lunch once we return the fishing gear. I take it everyone is fine with grilled fish?” Anima and the girls all nodded in unison. “Anima, could you stay here and guard the fish? We wouldn’t want some pesky birds to snatch them.”

“Worry not. I’ll protect these buckets with my life.”

Anima picked up the buckets and set them down right in front of himself. By the time the fish inside had settled down, the others had returned with the cooking equipment, so he picked up the buckets and headed for the furnace.

“Please give me a moment.” Luina set a cutting board on the picnic table right behind the furnace and began gutting the fish with precise, confident movements. “Myuke, Marie, please rub the fish with salt. You don’t have to be shy about it; cover them with as much as you can. Anima, can I ask you to skewer them once they’re properly salted? I’ll get the fire going in the meantime.”

Following Luina’s orders, the girls began rubbing a thin crust of salt onto the fish.

“We’re done!”

“Daddy, stewer!”

“Here I go!”

It was Anima’s turn to work. He carefully skewered each fish so as not to fracture their spines, and just as he finished skewering them all, smoke started to rise from the furnace. He glanced in Luina’s direction to find her skirt spread back and lifted slightly. She seemed to have grown a tail due to using her fire lizard stone.

“Mommy, all done!”

“Oh my, they look great!” she said with a smile as she picked up one of the skewers.

“Let me handle that,” Anima offered. “I wouldn’t want you to get burned.”

“Thank you. Please.”

Anima moved the skewers to a wire net.

“Your fish is huge, Marie!”

“Myukey’s too! When’s din-din?”

“Be patient; it’ll take a few minutes to cook.”

While listening to the crackling of the fire, the restlessly fidgeting girls stared at the fish cooking in the furnace. Anima was keeping track of the time, and flipped the skewers just at the right time. When he did, the fat that dripped off the fish fanned the flames, and it completely engulfed their dinner.

It didn’t take long for the enticing aroma of the fresh, salt-rubbed fish to entrance the girls—both of them audibly gulped at the exact same time. A few more moments passed, and Anima flipped the skewers again. The pronounced char marks on the visibly crispy skin told him that they were ready.

“They should be perfect now.”

“Thank you for the meal!” The moment Luina announced that dinner was ready, the girls said the magic words in unison, and Luina and Anima followed suit.

“Be careful of bones.”

“Owie, hod! Nummy!”

“We did an awesome job salting it, if I do say so myself!”

Watching the girls enjoy the salt-rubbed grilled fish, Anima couldn’t contain himself anymore. He opened his mouth wide and took a big bite. The crispy skin crackled under his teeth, and all the delicious juices from the magnificent catch exploded in his mouth. The thin layer of seasoning escaped as the soft meat dissolved, adding just the right amount of saltiness to the incredible dish.

“Nummy! More pease!”

“Me too, please!”

After practically licking the bones clean of meat, they reached for more and

began chowing down again. Shortly after them, Anima and Luina did the same. The family remained at the lakeshore until all the delicious grilled fish had been reduced to scraps.

◆◆◆

Later that night, Luina awoke to the rustling of clothes.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

She slowly sat up as the calming voice apologized to her, then rubbed her eyes clean of their sleepy haziness and slowly opened them. Before her, she found a young man wearing a gentle smile and a familiar black robe that covered his back all the way down to his ankles. It was Anima, who had just finished changing into his outside clothes.

“Are you leaving?” she asked him.

Given the time, seeing that robe only made her feel anxious and lonely. It was dark and silent outside, as if the bustling, lively cityscape from mere hours before had been but a mirage.

“I should be back by morning,” he told her. “Then we can continue our trip like nothing ever happened.”

He hadn’t wanted to make the kids worry, so he’d planned to leave under the veil of the night. He was truly a kind person. Three months earlier, she’d fallen for that incredible kindness that radiated from him—so much so that she’d married him on the spot. Even so, while she was happy that she had married such an outstanding person, she wanted him to pay more attention to himself as well.

“I appreciate your dedication, but your health is much more important than this trip.”

Anima did so much for his family during their trip. He had to have been getting tired both mentally and physically. Luina wouldn’t have been worried were he just going on some small errand, but he was going into battle. She would have prefered for him to be in peak condition.

“Don’t worry, I’m fine. I got to sleep next to you, after all,” Anima said with a

reassuring smile.

He didn't seem to be pushing himself. Perhaps the few hours of sleep he'd gotten was enough for him to completely recover.

His stamina and strength knew no bounds; the so-called strongest individual in the country, Malshan, didn't amount to more than a pesky fly to him. However, they still had no idea about the monster's strength. Anima may have been unbelievably powerful, but there was an ever-so-small chance the monster was even stronger. Having lost her father to similarly minuscule odds, Luina couldn't help but feel distressed.

"Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?" Luina touched her face in disbelief.

"You look afraid. Are you worried about me?"

"Why wouldn't I be? You're going into battle all alone… It makes me wish I could be by your side."

"You can't," Anima said in a stern voice, then immediately relaxed his furrowed brow and looked Luina in her eyes like an understanding father ready to console his upset child. "That truly means a lot to me, Luina, but I can't take you to the battlefield. It's too dangerous. Please, wait here for me."

"But…"

Seeing Luina shake from the stress, Anima gently wrapped her arms around her waist, pulled her closer, and hugged her tightly.



“It’s okay; I won’t lose. I’m not foolish enough to let such a beautiful woman become a widow.”

“Anima…”

Her husband’s strong yet gentle arms around her waist and the warmth radiating from his body calmed her mind. As his hug slowly released from around her waist she was met with his merry smile. She knew what was coming next. The butterflies erupted in her stomach as she patiently awaited her husband’s kiss that could come at any moment. But, Anima turned around and reached for the doorknob, leaving Luina completely dumbfounded.

“I have to go.”

“Umm… No kiss?”

“I’ll wait for that until I get home,” Anima chuckled as he watched Luina fidget. “It’ll help motivate me in the upcoming battle.”

“Then I’ll patiently wait here until I can get that kiss,” Luina said with a mellow smile.

After flashing one last smile at his wife, Anima left the room. He met up with Shaer, and the two left the inn before the sun had risen. They trod the quiet, empty streets heading to the gate opposite the one they entered from, and left Barjyo.

By the time they made it out of the city, the light had slowly begun to illuminate the green plains, banishing the shadows of the night. As he imagined the wonder in his family’s eyes if they could have seen the spectacle, a warm smile appeared on his face.

“Lord Anima, we should make our way to the bridge posthaste,” Shaer urged from above.

“I know.”

Anima readied himself and blasted off toward the bridge, cutting through the morning fog. He wanted to deal with the monster and get back to his family as soon as possible so they could enjoy the rest of their trip together. Driven by that desire, he put his decades of rigorous training to use and navigated the

road at breakneck speed. It didn't take long before the beautiful plains came to an end and he and Shaer entered a bleak wasteland. Seeing her land a bit ahead of him, he stopped as well.

"Your running speed is quite impressive. I'm aware the minotaur stone enhances your physical abilities, but I worry if you'll be able to fight after expending so much mana."

"Don't worry. My reserves are bottomless."

"I believe in your abilities." Visibly wary of something, she gazed into the distance. Anima followed her gaze and spotted a strange line. Taking a closer look revealed that it was a crack—a precipice splitting the land as far as the eye could see. "Can you see the bridge there?"

Squinting his eyes, he found the bridge Shaer was referring to, a small figure resting on it. He couldn't make out the figure's appearance from such a distance, but it certainly looked like some sort of monster. Shaer had reported that it was a human girl behind the monstrous appearance, but it made no difference if it were human or demon; Anima's focus was on one thing alone.

"You'll help me contact the king if I defeat that monster, correct?"

"A knight never goes back on her word."

"I certainly hope not," Anima stated almost threateningly, and began walking toward the monster.

"Are you heading into battle already? Don't get me wrong, I'm quite happy you're so eager to fight that monster, but as she doesn't seem to have noticed us yet, wouldn't you like to take a bit more time to, umm… to get yourself into the mood to fight first?"

"There's no need. I have more than enough reason to end this quickly. I've been in the mood to fight since long before we got here." He wanted to go back to his beloved family. That was the only thing on his mind. "You'd best watch this battle from above."

"I shall. It's quite disheartening to admit, but I would likely only hinder your ability to fight if I were to stay beside you on the battlefield."

Shaer flew up into the air, and Anima blasted off in the direction of the monster, closing the distance in no time. On his approach, the monster had either heard his footsteps or seen him coming, as it started walking toward him. Once they'd gotten close enough to make out each other's appearances, Anima stopped for a moment. What was making its way toward him was a creature the likes of which he recalled vividly.

A large, dragon-like creature. Its body was covered in scales, and its wings and tail were long and menacing. Save for its color—jade green rather than crimson—it looked the same as Malshan had when he'd transformed and attacked Anima and his family. There was only one reason that a human girl would look that way.

She's using the magic stone from one of the Harbinger's familiars?

If that was the case, it meant that she was the descendant of one of the few select families that had fought alongside the Scarletts in their heroic battle against the Harbinger. Why would someone of that status go down the path of misdeed? Malshan may have wanted Luina dead, but his motivation was clear: he wanted the Harbinger stone for himself. In contrast, the girl he was about to fight was simply acting as a roadblock. Could there have been some grand scheme she planned to fulfill by blocking access to the bridge?

Anima racked his brain, but he couldn't figure out the answer without any information. The monster didn't seem eager to nonchalantly share her plans, either, so his only option was to get her to talk by force. Or so he thought.

"You'd better be Merkalt, m'kay?" The monster spoke to Anima. Her voice was rather high-pitched, as though she were still rather young. It caught him off-guard. "Don't you dare ignore me, m'kay?"

The monster was furious. Like a child throwing a fit, she repeatedly stamped the ground with her tail, filling the bleak wasteland with claps like thunder and making it shake. She was far stronger than any adult; her strength was incomparable to that of humans as a whole. No average person could even begin to imagine what a monster like her would be capable of during a real battle if such a display of power was being used as a mere form of intimidation. They would lose whatever will they had to fight, if not their entire

consciousness, out of fear.

Anima, however, didn't even flinch. Not only had he fought creatures that were several magnitudes scarier, but he also had to protect the peaceful life of his family. He couldn't afford to run even if he was scared. He prepared his calmest tone to answer the monster.

"Malshan won't come. I beat him."

"Really? You're stronger than Merkalt? M'kay…"

"I am. The difference is like night and day."

"I sure hope so, m'kay?"

The monster curled its wide mouth into a smile and slowly started making her way toward Anima. Her wings spread, she pulled her imposing tail behind herself as the sun glistened off her sharp claws.

"Wait."

To his surprise, she actually stopped.

"What's the matter, you scared? Terrified, even? Good! Then run! I'm not interested in weaklings or women, m'kay?"

"Why do you not have interest in weaklings and women?"

"'Cause I'm the strongest woman there is, m'kay?"

Her cryptic reasoning confirmed two things to Anima. First, as Shaer had reported, the monster was indeed a girl. Second, and even more important, she hadn't gone too far off the deep end. Their small exchange revealed that she wasn't looking to fight; if she were, she wouldn't have offered to let him escape. She had to have some sort of goal in mind in blocking the bridge. If Anima was able to grant her wish, it was possible that he could settle things without hurting the girl.

"I won't fight you."

He raised his hands and started slowly walking toward the monster. Clearly suspicious, she bared her fangs.

"If you're not gonna fight, why're you coming over here, hmm? You'd better

have something up your sleeve if you wanna beat me up close, m'kay?"

"I could beat you from miles away if I wanted to."

He could burn her to ash, or even crush her to death with his earth magic. He could, but he had no plans to use any magic—or his fists, for that matter. He was firmly against hitting girls.

"You say that like you're stronger than me. You sure are funny, m'kay?"

"I say that because I am."

"Then take this, m'kay?"

She turned around and sliced through the air with her sharp tail, aiming at Anima's abdomen. Without so much as flinching, he caught it with a single hand, sending pieces of something across the ground. The impact of the strike had torn off some of her scales, scattering them around him.

"I took it," he informed her in a calm, collected voice.

In doing so, he made the beast shudder, a reaction he had experienced before. It meant that she was either deathly afraid of his overwhelming strength or immeasurably angry at his perceived arrogance. Much to his surprise, however, the reason was something entirely different.

"Incredible! That power is amazing, m'kay? You sure can take a hit, m'kay?" Her voice was filled with awe at Anima's unbelievable strength. She had shuddered from the overwhelming happiness it filled her with.

"Yes, I'm strong. Much stronger than you can ever hope to be. So please, surrender. I promise I won't hurt you."

"Answer me first, m'kay?"

"I'm listening."

"Do you have any chronic diseases? And tell me about the last time you caught a cold, too, m'kay?"

A strange question that put a lot on the line. She would surrender, but only if Anima gave a favorable answer. He didn't know what she was looking for, but he was not one to lie to children.

“I don’t have any chronic diseases, and I’ve never suffered from a cold. Send me to the highest peaks wearing only a loincloth, have me cross a scorching desert, I’ll come back like nothing ever happened. I have traversed the Desert of Perish and eaten the most toxic of demons, yet I’ve never had as much as an upset stomach.”

“You pass, m’kay?!”

“I… ‘pass’?”

“With flying colors, m’kay?! You’re sturdy! Sturdier than I ever imagined! No matter what happens, you’re bound to survive, m’kay?!”

Her euphoric cheers made Anima wonder if she was the type who reveled in defeating strong foes. If she was, it was nothing but bad news. He knew from experience that people like that wouldn’t give up until they won.

“Do you still want to fight me?”

“Nope! I lost, m’kay?”

She admitted defeat, to which Anima let out a sigh of relief. He didn’t want to hurt a child.

“Then why don’t you stop using that magic stone for me.”

“Gladly, m’kay?” Her immediate response was followed by a blinding light. It enveloped her dark-green scales, and the monster’s body shrunk down and transformed into the form of a human. “I hope we’re all good now, m’kay?”

The light faded to reveal a small girl. No more than ten or eleven years old, her small stature and tan skin contrasted with her long silver hair and the big ribbon tied into it to give her a very unique appearance. She wore a beautiful, colorful dress, complete with a dark-green earring.

“Tell me, m’kay?”

“Tell you what?”

“Tell me I’m cute, m’kay?”

“Hm? Ah, yes, you’re very cute.”

Anima admitted to her cuteness. Despite having feared them for the longest

time, he had come to find children adorable. Back in his own world, his heart shattered every time a child broke out in tears the moment they spotted him. But ever since his summoning by Luina, he'd had no reason to fear making a child cry. Not a single time a child had looked at him had they done so with fear in their eyes, and the tan girl in front of him was no exception.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"I'm Bram, m'kay?" she answered with a beaming smile. Being told she was cute must have thrilled her.

"Incredible! Truly spectacular! You extinguished the great danger in a matter of minutes!" Disrupting their conversation, Shaer joyously complimented Anima on his work. Descending toward them, she kept her eyes fixed on Bram, a hand on the hilt of her sword all the while. "Now, hand over that dragon stone. And don't try anything funny."

"I'm not giving you anything, m'kay?" Bram contested. She put a small hand over her earring and glared at Shaer, who took a step back feeling the pressure on herself.

"Lord Anima, please allow me to confirm: did she surrender to you?"

"Yes, she admitted defeat."

"Thank goodness!" she said with a relieved smile. "So, may I have that stone now?"

"Argh, quit it already, m'kay?! What aren't you getting here?! I'm not giving you anything! Ask me again and I'll punch you, m'kay?!"

"Lord Anima, I'll need you to take that stone from her by force."

"I will not."

"Wh-Why not?" Shaer asked, utterly shocked by his response. "She might create this same problem again somewhere else!"

"I'm not doing this again, m'kay?!"

"And why would I believe your words?"

"I believe her," Anima interrupted, causing Shaer's eyes to nearly pop out of

her skull.

“B-But why?!”

“Adults are responsible for believing children.” He turned to Bram and looked deep into her eyes. “Are you going to use that stone to hurt others, Bram?”

“I swear I won’t, m’kay?”

“See?” Anima flashed a gentle smile. “There’s no reason to take the stone away from her.”

“E-Excuse my ignorance, but what are you going to do if she betrays her promise?”

“I’ll scold her. Adults are responsible for scolding children when they do something mischievous.”

Shaer fell silent for a second before letting out a drawn sigh.

“Understood. I’ll trust your judgment, Lord Anima.”

“Thank you.”

“I should be the one expressing gratitude. Thanks to your efforts in liberating this bridge, life here can return to normal. Now, shall we head back?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

As he turned around, he felt a tug on his robe.

“What’s the rush? Tell me where you’re going, m’kay?”

“To Barjyo.”

“Is that where you live? M’kay…”

“No, I’m actually on a trip. Once we get back to the city, we’re going to head to the port.”

“Ooh, the port! Sounds good, m’kay?”

Wearing a big smile, Bram let go of Anima’s robe, setting him free. As soon as she did so, he rushed back to his beloved family at top speed.

Chapter Four: The Demon Lord Receives a Proposal

Upon his return to the inn, Anima fulfilled his promise to Luina and kissed her, then took her and the girls out to eat. They found a nice restaurant, where they enjoyed a filling breakfast of runny rolled omelets, crispy bacon, fluffy bread, crunchy salads, and sweet mangoes. When they'd finished, they made their way through the bustling streets and left Barjyo.

"How did you like Barjyo?"

"Was it fun?"

The couple asked the girls while walking the lovely little road through the plains. Their questions were answered with beautiful smiles.

"Uh-huh! The, the, umm, the tsime was so pitty!"

"We can listen to the chime all day once we get home, Marie. How about you, Myuke?"

"I loved how crazy the market was, and fishing was super fun!"

"Myukey catched lots!"

"You caught two as well, didn't you?"

"Mommy and Daddy catched lots too!"

Their excitement from yesterday hadn't waned, much to Anima's delight.

"You two have a real knack for fishing. Can you teach me how to do it once we get home?"

"You bet! I'll train you day and night until you're an expert fisherman!"

"I don't think we need to go that far, but I'm looking forward to it."

Anima was elated at the prospect of fishing with his girls again, though that day wouldn't come for a while. The monster had been dealt with, but he still had a number of things on his plate before he and the girls could return home. First, he had to get to the port and get a ferry to the capital. Once there, he

would have to wait for Shaer to organize an audience with the king, where he would settle his unfortunate scuffle with Malshan once and for all.

“Where are we going now?”

“The port. I’m not familiar with the area at all, but maybe Luina knows a thing or two about it.”

“Mommy, whassa ‘pord’?” Marie asked, excited to visit another town she’d never been to before. Luina flashed a delighted smile, ready to live up to her daughter’s enthusiasm.

“The port is at the edge of the sea.”

“Whassa ‘sea’?”

“The sea is like a very big lake.”

“Seawater is super salty, though. It stings if it gets into your mouth,” Myuke explained, flaunting her knowledge.

“It tings? Wooow!”

“Well done, Myuke. That’s exactly right. Have you been to the sea before?”

“Nope. I just know some stuff about it,” she replied, a bit flushed. “Y’know, I’ve always wanted to visit the sea! I wanna see for myself just how big it is!”

“I’m glad you’ll be able to scratch that off your bucket list.”

“Thanks for bringing me along!”

Anima was happy from the bottom of his heart to see his daughter smiling so gleefully.

“We’ll find somewhere to sit and watch it from once we get there, okay?”

“That’d be awesome! I hope there’s a place we can get a *really* good look from.”

“There is,” Luina added.

“Really?”

“I’ll show you around once we get there.”

“Yay, thank you! I hope we get there soon!”

“I hope!” Marie excitedly repeated her older sister’s words as the four continued down the road, happily chit-chatting until the scenery around them changed from bright green to reddish brown.

“Reeed! I love red!” Marie exclaimed upon setting her eyes on the vast prairie spanning her entire field of vision. She leaped excitedly over and over again. Soon enough, though, she’d tired herself out, and looked at Anima with sweet, pleading eyes.

“Daddy, up!” Anima wasn’t one to deny his adorable daughter’s request. He wrapped his arms around her and lifted her up, but she immediately changed her mind. “Daddy, down!”

Despite his desire to hold his daughter, he honored her request, putting her down and holding her hand as they walked. As the sun began its descent below the horizon, Myuke stopped abruptly.

“I see something!”

She pointed in the direction they were headed, toward the crack splitting the ground. There was something visible within the bottomless divide.

“That’s a bridge,” Anima told her.

“The bridge where you faced Bram?”

“Exactly.”

He had told his family about his encounter with Bram while they were making their way to the restaurant earlier that day. He’d shared that her true form was a brown-skinned little girl, that she had used a magic stone from one of the Harbinger’s familiars to wreak havoc, and that she had promised to never do evil deeds again. Luina had been surprised to learn that Bram was a little girl, but she was outright shocked when she’d learned about the magic stone.

She had known about the existence of the Jade Dragon stone. Upon inheriting the Harbinger stone, she was told to ally with the families in possession of the Harbinger’s familiars’ stones. As such, she knew which families kept which of the powerful artifacts.

The Jade Dragon stone was held by the Boise family. What made Bram’s

actions even more strange was that, unlike Merkalt, most families that possessed a Harbinger's familiar's stone lived overseas. Why would someone like here come here only to block a bridge?

"Bram is… not here," Luina pointed out.

Just as she'd promised, she seemed to have given up on blocking the bridge. Shaer seemed to have been relieved by Bram's absence, as she descended from the sky and scanned the area.

"Gotta say, this is quite the bridge," Myuke murmured from the base of the natural bridge connecting the two sides of the divide.

"Are you afraid to cross it?"

"Nah, I'm all good!"

Myuke's confident affirmation delighted Anima. She had been scared half to death to cross the rope bridge on their way to Barjyo, but she'd already overcome her fear.

"I go! With Myukey!"

"Okay! Let's cross it together!"

The girls took each other's hands, then Anima took Myuke's and Luina took Marie's. The four crossed the bridge together, walking side by side.

"Whassat?" Marie asked, pointing at the mountain of equipment piled up on the bridge. It was covered in a layer of dust and some of it was dangling over the ravine, but every single piece in the pile was inlaid with a magic stone.

"Magic stones! Look at 'em all!" Myuke shouted in excitement. Her eyes sparkled as if she'd found buried treasure, and she picked up one piece of equipment after another, polishing each one. "A gargoyle stone! Ah, and this one's a cockatrice stone! Wooow, there's even a skeleton stone in here!"

"How can you tell from just looking at them?"

Save for the different color, they all looked the same for Anima.

"I've spent so much time in magic stone shops that I learned to tell them apart at a glance! Anyway, what's all this doing here? Did a gust of wind pull

everything out from a magic stone shop except the individual stones or something?”

“I would imagine that girl collected them here,” Shaer suggested as she landed alongside the group.

“‘That girl’? Oh, you mean Bram? Why didn’t she take them home?”

“I don’t believe she is interested in magic stones.”

“No? But then why’s she got so many?”

“Every Hunter who came here to face the monster was overwhelmed by her strength, and offered their equipment in exchange for their lives. It had become a mountain of valuable gear by the time we were dispatched. Identifying the owner of each piece would be nigh impossible, but leaving them here would hinder traversal of the bridge. To that end, I have already informed my team about the current state of affairs and arranged for the temporary retrieval of the equipment.”

Shaer seemed to have already contacted the Knights using a magic stone specialized for long-distance communication. As she and her knights responded directly to the king, there was a chance that the royals had already been informed of Anima’s feat.

“Oh… Well, whatever. I have a slime stone for myself, so it’s fine…”

The myriad stones laid out in front of Myuke were each infinitely more valuable than her slime stone, and though she had wanted to keep at least one of them for herself, the guilt from swiping one would be too much for her to bear. She stood up, looked straight ahead, and crossed the bridge with her family. By the time they reached the other side, she seemed to have completely forgotten about the magic stones, and focused on the port town that awaited them.

“When are we gonna get to the port?” she asked.

“At this rate, we should make it there by tomorrow morning,” Luina answered.

“Tomorrow morning, huh? I can’t wait to see the place! I’m super excited!”

“I am too.”

Anima couldn’t wait to see the awe and genuine smiles on his children’s faces the moment they laid eyes on the beautiful port town. Excited to reach their destination, he and his family continued along the road under the setting sun.

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As the sun once again chased away the dark of night, Anima and his family set out, climbing a gentle slope under the bright sun on their way to the port town. The girls had conquered a mountain a couple days before, so the shallow incline gave them no trouble. Still, even the smallest of slopes was not to be underestimated. Given enough time, they would tire a person out, so Anima began looking around for a suitable place for them all to take a break.

“Is the port somewhere on this hill?” Myuke asked.

“No. It’s on the other side, at the bottom.”

“So we have to get all the way to the top, huh?”

“Do you want to take a break?” Anima offered, but Myuke shook her head.

“I’m fine, this is nothing!”

“Impressive, Myuke.”

“Me too! I can keep cimbin’ too!”

“You’re very impressive as well, Marie. If only I could be as strong as you girls, but Daddy’s getting tired. Can we rest for a bit?”

“Daddy, no rest! Seeping on the hill’s bad! You roll!”

He wanted to tell Marie that she was right, but letting the girls stop for a breather was more important. Their desire to see the port as soon as possible drove them onward, but they were clearly running out of stamina. They all took a break under the shade of a roadside tree, then got up and resumed their climb, which transformed into a descent soon after. At the end of the road, hidden by a luxuriant thicket of trees lay their goal, the port town.

“We’re almost there! Let’s go!”

“Lessgo!”

Anima and Luina took the lead, the girls encouraging them from behind. They continued their journey, arriving at the port town just as the sun reached its highest point in the sky.

“We’re here!”

“Yaaaaay!”

They passed through the town’s wooden gate and immediately squinted their eyes in response to the blinding light that greeted them. The white buildings surrounding them reflected the strong sunlight, making the whole town feel bright and bustling. The busy voices coming from the surrounding stalls and the salty air enticed the girls; they were ready to explore the port until they were completely exhausted.

“What are they selling there?”

“Whassat ’mell?”

“Oh, yeah! What’s this weird smell?”

“It’s the saltwater,” Luina explained. “You can tell that you’re close to the sea by the smell of salt in the air.”

“We’re at the sea! C’mon, let’s go! I wanna see it!”

“Me too! Me too!”

“Okay, let’s go.”

“Why don’t we go to the overlook I know? Follow me!” Luina nonchalantly took the lead. She was excited to re-experience the beautiful view she had enjoyed with her family as a child.

Her excitement was contagious. Anima and the girls followed Luina down the cobblestone road that cut through the town. In only a couple of minutes, they reached the outskirts, where the tightly packed buildings were replaced by peaceful, detached houses, and the busy stalls were nothing but a quiet backdrop to the serene atmosphere. Not long after that, they arrived at a large cliff, towering above the rest of the area and overlooking the sea.

“Let’s head up!”

A flight of stairs led up to the promontory. Anima brought up the rear to protect the girls from falling if they happened to slip. There was a handrail they could hold on to, but he didn't want to take any chances.

The top was covered in a thin layer of green weeds, and there was a wooden fence around its edge. What drew Anima's attention, however, was the white structure in front of him. It was a tall tower, standing proudly atop the promontory like a knife stabbed into a cake.

"Tall! What's it?"

"It's a lighthouse."

"Whassa lihhouse?"

"When night falls and it gets really, really dark, ships out on the sea can get easily lost. They light the lights on the top of this tower to help ships find their way."

"Thank you, lihhouse!" Marie thanked the lighthouse while Myuke looked at it in amazement.

"D'you think we can climb this?"

"It's open for the public during the day," Luina said with a chuckle. "The special spot I mentioned is at the top."

"Yaaay! We'll see so far out into the sea from up there!"

"I'll see the sea!"

Myuke and Marie were all too excited.

The lighthouse doors opened, welcoming them inside. The girls immediately started climbing the spiral staircase that led to the gallery, and Anima and Luina followed behind them. While the climb was tiring, the view from up there was sure to reinvigorate them.

The space got narrower and the steps got smaller as they got higher up. One wrong step and they could easily have found themselves tumbling down to the base of the lighthouse. It was especially difficult to climb for adults, but the girl's small feet easily conquered the stairs; they briskly made their way up to the top.

“Wooow!”

“So pitty!”

Their shouts upon reaching the gallery echoed through the lighthouse. Arriving moments after them, Anima instinctively squinted his eyes due to the bright sunlight. His eyes tickled by the salty breeze, he slowly opened them.

“This is… incredible.”

The wonderful scenery enraptured him. The azure sea panned out as far as he could see, melting together with the horizon to blend the sky and sea. Below him, light waves licked the rocks. The white bubbles swimming with the tide could very well have passed for fluffy clouds.

“Look, Marie! We’re at the sea!”

“Bue and pitty! Like the ‘ky!”

Marie pressed her face against the iron guardrail encircling the gallery with a genuine, awe-filled smile.

“Right?! I thought the same thing! I figured it’d be all see-through, but it’s so blue!”

“It’s blue because it reflects the color of the sky. It actually turns red during sunset.”

“I love red!”

“Me too! I *so* want to see that! Say, when’s the ferry leaving?”

“I think Shaer said right after lunchtime, didn’t she?” Luina asked. “But don’t worry, you’ll have a perfect view of the sea from the ferry. No matter when we depart, you’ll get to see the sunset paint it red.”

Myuke’s smile grew even bigger.

“Where are all the ships?”

“The harbor is on the other side of the town.”

Luina pointed across the port town, which was shaped like a boomerang. The pier they wanted, stretching into the sea, was abuzz with people loading cargo into a big ferry. Other piers were crowded with smaller fishing boats, but

reaching the capital in one of those was sure to be difficult, if not impossible, so they were going to ride the ferry.

“I can’t wait to set sail,” Anima said. “I hope the ride will be nice.”

“Same! But I’m kinda nervous… I heard boats sway a lot.”

“Don’t worry,” Luina assured Myuke to calm her down. “It’s true that small boats sway quite a bit, but bigger ships like the one we’ll be on are fairly stable. The ship I rode when I was little didn’t sway at all.”

“Ah! Look! Look! There!”

Marie’s voice filled the lighthouse. She had made her way to the other side of the gallery, and though the guardrail surrounded the entire platform, it could have been disastrous if she were to start climbing it, so Anima rushed over to prevent that. Before he could get there, though, she pressed her face up against the fence in a daze of pure wonder.

With a sigh of relief, he followed Marie’s gaze. A vast, emerald-green field surrounded by a wooden fence stretched out before him. Within that field, a number of long, black shadows caught his attention. They were rather far away, so he couldn’t say for certain, but the shadows were probably being cast by the cattle inhabiting the field. In other words, Marie was most likely entranced by the meek-looking cows.

“Whassat?”

“Cows,” Luina told her. “The owners of the ranch treated us to a cup of delicious, fresh milk the last time I was here.”

“You geted milk?”

“Yes. It was really sweet and warm.”

The girls gulped in unison, which set the gears in Anima’s head in motion. He began thinking of how he could quench their thirst for new experiences.

“Where are you going next?”

“Eep!”

“I-I’m terribly sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you!”

Shaer suddenly floated up on the other side of the fence, and was greeted by Myuke's short yelp. She had been accidently startling Myuke ever since they'd arrived at Barjyo—Myuke would jump, and Shaer would apologize profusely.

"'S-Startle'?! Who's startled?! I'm perfectly calm!"

She was obviously feigning composure, but Shaer believed what she said and let out a sigh of relief.

"So, what is your next destination?"

"The rash! I'm, I'm gonna dink lossa milk!"

"I understand." Her words put a warm smile on Shaer's face. "A trip to the ranch should fit into our schedule."

"Are we departing soon?"

Shaer nodded in response to Anima's question.

"The cargo has been loaded into the ferry, and boarding for the general public will begin shortly. I'll inform you when it's time to board, so please, enjoy your remaining time in this town."

"We will. Thank you."

After expressing their gratitude to Shaer, Anima and his family descended the lighthouse and made their way to the ranch.

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Arriving at the beautiful ranch, the four approached the fence to take a closer look at the spotted cows enjoying their day. Most of them were eating grass off in the distance, with the closest one to them about fifty steps away from the fence. It was a truly idyllic scene that soothed one's soul, though the girls probably wanted more. Anima imagined that they'd want to touch the meek farm animals.

"So cuuute!"

"Look at them munching away!"

They looked at the cows with a sense of wonder from behind the fence, but they clearly wanted to get a closer look at them.

“Mish Cow!” Marie greeted the closest cow and waved her hand at it, but the animal didn’t even blink. The grass in front of it was more enticing than her. “I’m here, Mish Cow! Here!”

She had been so happy just moments earlier, but she wasn’t taking it well that she was being completely ignored. Tears began forming in the corners of her eyes. She kept waving her hand at the cow as fast as she could, but the animal wanted nothing to do with her. It turned its rear toward Marie and walked away.

“Mish Cow’s leabing…”

“I’m sorry.”

“Does she hases me?”

The sudden betrayal by her animal friend really disappointed Marie. It must have been her first experience with being ignored. Luina gently pet the sobbing girl’s head.

“Not at all,” Luina said in a soothing voice while gently petting the sobbing girl’s head. “I think she might just be shy.”

“Sy?”

“Mm-hmm. Let’s watch them from here, okay?”

“’Kaaay!”

Marie excitedly nodded. She didn’t want to make anyone, even if they were an animal, feel uncomfortable. Anima pat her on the head, silently praising her for being such a good girl.

“Look! What’s that barn over there?”

Myuke pointed at a long, wooden building visible in the distance.

“That’s a cowshed. We bought milk there the last time we were here.”

“Milk! I want milk!”

“Right? I’d love some milk too!”

During their trip, Myuke had finally come out of her shell. She had stopped holding herself back and was really enjoying herself.

“Let’s go get some, then,” Anima said with a nod.

With the cheerful girls in tow, they approached the cowshed. They opened the large door and peeked inside. A cold breeze passed by them, leaving behind the smell of freshly cut grass, which only got stronger as they made their way deeper inside, following the narrow dirt road that was surrounded by cages filled with straw. The man standing in the middle of the cowshed noticed them, and started walking in their direction.

“Hey there, y’all. How c’n I help ya?”

“We’re here to buy milk,” Anima answered.

“Comin’ right up.” The man welcomed them with a cheerful smile. “Just gotta let Charlotte out into the open first.”

“Who’s Charlotte?” Myuke didn’t know anyone by that name.

“One a’ my cows, Missy. I just milked the ol’ girl!”

“Cow?! Where?!”

The man smiled when he saw the excitement in Marie’s eyes.

“Right ’ere, Missy. Wanna give ’er a good ol’ rub?”

“Fo weal? I wanna pet the cow!”

“Sure ya’ can, Missy. But only if ya’ promise to keep quiet around Charlotte.”

“Pomise,” she whispered.

“Can I pet her too?” Myuke requested.

“’Course ya can! C’mon, follow me!”

They walked a bit deeper into the shed and stopped in front of a cage. Inside was a white cow with beautiful black spots. The girls ogled her through the bars as she stuffed her cheeks full of the straw piled up in front of her.

“Wooow! Hi, Mish Cow!”

“D-Does she bite?”

Myuke got startled when they finally reached the cow. Seeing the hesitation in her eyes, the man gently pet the cow’s head. In response, the cow did

absolutely nothing; it continued chewing away at the mouthful of feed as if nothing were happening.

“She’s a gentle girl. She ain’t gonna mind ya pettin’ ’er so long as yer careful.”

Myuke let out a sigh of relief, then she and Marie gently pet the cow’s big forehead.

“Wooow!”

Marie looked back at her parents with stars in her eyes and wonder all over her face. Seeing her parents’ warm smiles, she went back for another round. Once they’d gotten their fill of cow-petting, they made their way outside.

“Soff, soooff cow!”

“I can still feel her warmth on my hand.”

The girls excitedly shared their experiences while the man stepped away momentarily. When he returned, he was carrying a tray of four long glasses filled to the brim with pure-white milk.

“White! I love white!”

“It looks super yummy!”

“I’ll have ya know that we got the best milk anywhere in the country! One sip and y’all ain’t never go back to the stuff them city folk call milk.”

“That sounds great. How much?” Anima asked while counting the coins he’d brought with him.

“Three copper fer four of ’em.”

It was unexpectedly cheap. Anima was trying to understand the value of money in his new world by accompanying Luina on her grocery shopping trips, so he’d expected four glasses to cost around five copper. Was the man trying to sell them spoiled milk?

“Why so cheap?”

Anima didn’t want to upset him; he had been kind enough to let the girls pet the cows, after all. Instead of outright accusing him of selling them a bad product, he decided to ask instead.

“Don’t get me started, friend. Just a li’l while ago I coulda sold it for twice that, but sales’ve gone down lately. I’d rather sell it fer cheap than have it spoil on me.” The man grieved over his lost business. “I’m sure y’all heard ’bout that beast blocking the bridge. This here milk business is my only source a’ income, and that monster’s just campin’ there, killin’ my livelihood. I can’t keep the milk from goin’ bad forever, even with my magic stone, dagnabbit!”

The milk would spoil by the time it reached its destination if the man followed the detour. His hands were tied; he had no choice but to cut the price of his product.

“Daddy beated the scary moster!”

The man curiously titled his head.

“He did what now, Missy?”

“Don’t mind her.” Anima immediately nipped the conversation in the bud. He did defeat the monster, but it was better to keep that under wraps until an official notice came from the knights. If the news spread through the city prematurely, it would create a huge commotion. “I’m sure it’ll be resolved soon.”

“I dang well hope so, my friend. I certainly do. But that’s ’nuff talking, drink up while it’s still nice ’n cold!”

“Thank you.”

After paying, Anima took his glass and sat down on a nearby bench. He and his family watched the cows laze around in the distance as a gentle breeze passed by them. All the while, they tasted the milk.

“Nummy!”

“Wow! It’s so delicious!”

The fresh milk was incredibly sweet and rich. It made the milk they could buy in the city taste like water. The girls liked it so much that they gulped down their tall glasses in mere seconds.

“Nummy!”

“That was great.”

Drinking so quickly had left a thick milk moustache above Marie's mouth. Anima gently wiped it off while she squirmed in her seat.

"Ah, look! One of them is walking up to us!" Myuke excitedly pointed to the other side of the fence, where a cow with a familiar pattern of spots was approaching them. It was the same they had just been petting. "Is she coming back for more?"

"I go to Mish Cow?"

"Of course you can." Upon receiving Luina's approval, the girls pushed up against the fence to watch the cows. While watching the girls as they enjoyed themselves, Anima and Luina drank their own glasses of milk. "Marie's having so much fun. She's completely fascinated by those cows. I was worried she was going to ask us to move here."

A cool, refreshing breeze blew by the couple, making Luina's long blue hair flutter as she shared her slight worry with Anima. It didn't faze him, however, as his beautiful wife's enchanting smile stoked the flame of his burning love for her all the more.

"Don't worry," he said, "Marie loves Myuke. If Myuke said she was leaving for the next town right this very moment, Marie would follow her without a word."

"Hehe, you're absolutely right. She really loves her big sister."

"Mm-hmm. Just the two of them being together makes her genuinely happy, and Myuke loves Marie to bits too. I can't even imagine them ever getting into a fight."

"They'd never do that. Though Myuke *was* a little troublemaker back in the day."

"Wait, really?" Anima blurted out in surprise. Myuke was wary of strangers, but she loved her family from the bottom of her heart. He couldn't imagine her causing any trouble.

"She never fought with Marie because of the age difference, but she often did with the other kids around her age back when there were many more children living at the orphanage."

Luina stared at Myuke's back with a hint of sorrow in her eyes. Imagining the grief she must have felt when her bustling, happy family had slowly vanished into nothingness tugged at Anima's heartstrings.

"Is there anything I can do for her?"

"You've already done more than enough." Luina squeezed Anima's hand. "You became the father she never had, took her on a trip, and let her enjoy her days to the fullest. I can't thank you enough for all that."

"There's no need. Seeing her smile makes *me* want to thank *you* instead. But can we back up for a moment? If you'd like, I can help you make the orphanage as lively as it once was."

Luina went beet red at Anima's proposal, recalling the discussion they'd had after defeating Malshan. She'd confirmed that she wanted to have his child, but in the two months since, neither of them had made any attempts to achieve that goal.

"Do you… want children?"

"I wouldn't mind raising an army of offspring with you, Luina."

He had expected his answer to scare her by being too greedy, but much to his surprise, she accepted it with a delighted smile.

"I want to have a child with you too, but…"

"But what?"

"Well, I've never done anything like… like *that* before. What if I wake the girls, and…" Luina's cheeks boiled as she shared her fear with Anima. It wasn't exactly a topic meant to be discussed outside on a beautiful morning with their children. "Sorry, forget I said anything. I was just rambling."

"No, you weren't. It's important to talk about these things. Still, I can't deny it's somewhat embarrassing…"

Luina kept her eyes cast down on the ground. Unsure of how to lessen her shame, Anima silently squeezed her hand back.

"Pardon my intrusion Lord Anima, Lady Luina, but we should board the ferry soon."

Unexpectedly, Shaer landed nearby and informed them of the time in a quiet voice. She was clearly being mindful not to startle Myuke again.

“It’s time already?” Time flew by when one was having fun. Anima had awoken to that fact after marrying Luina three months earlier. “Myuke, Marie, we’re boarding the ship soon!”

“One looked right at me!”

“Me too! Her eyes is sooo big!”

Anima stood up while he waited for the girls, who shared the highlight of their cow-gazing on their way over to their parents.

“I’m glad you had fun. Now, go say goodbye to the cows before we head to the pier.”

The girls nodded and eagerly waved back at the farm.

“Bye-bye, Mish Cow!”

“Thank you for the delicious milk!”

The cows raised their heads for a moment before going back to munching on the grass. With the elated girls having had their fair share of fun in petting and watching the cows to their hearts’ content, they made their way back toward the port.

“L-Lord Anima!” Shaer, in a panic, landed next to the family as they neared the area of the lighthouse. “This is a disaster!”

“What happened?”

“That girl is making a scene at the farm!”

“Bram is?”

Shaer nodded.

“Please, come with me!”

“Lead the way.”

Leaving his family behind, Anima followed Shaer to the cowshed, where he saw a little girl shouting at a man. As he had been told, Bram, in a one-piece

dress that looked strikingly similar to a wedding dress, was stomping the ground in rage.

“Give me milk! My mouth’s drier than a desert, m’kay?!” she scoffed at the man, who held a glass of milk high above his head.

“What happened?”

Both Bram and the man let out a relieved sigh when they caught sight of Anima.

“He’s keeping the milk from me, m’kay?”

“Big talk when yer tryin’ to drink ’n run!”

“I didn’t run anywhere! I paid you plenty, m’kay?”

“I don’t take no magic stones!”

Anima noticed a necklace inlaid with a snow-white gem in Bram’s hand. Naturally, her dark-green earring was still dangling from her ear—she could have easily taken the milk by force if she’d wanted to. As promised, however, she was trying to avoid using the Jade Dragon stone to hurt others. Shaer must’ve realized the same thing, as her grave expression faded.

“Daddy, who’s this girl?” Myuke asked from behind him. She and the rest of his family seemed to have caught up to him.

“That’s Bram.”

“Ah, oka—No way!” Myuke stared at Bram’s hand in disbelief. “I-Is that a Pegasus stone?!”

“Ooh, you’re good!” Bram turned around, smirking. “C’mon, tell this guy how valuable this stone is, m’kay?”

“The Pegasus stone is the most valuable stone of all the ones that let you fly! Just a drop of mana is more than enough to safely cross a huge distance in the air! You’ll live like a king for at least half a year if you sell one!”

“Well said! Now give me my milk already, m’kay?”

“I ain’t doin’ no bartering here.”

He clearly wasn’t open to negotiations.

“Tch. I don’t get what your problem is, m’kay?!” Bram grumbled to herself while the man turned toward Anima with a troubled expression.

“Y’all know this li’l lady, don’tcha? Whaddaya say to helpin’ a friend out?”

“Here, let me pay for her drink.”

After Anima paid up, the man thanked him profusely for freeing him from his customer from hell. He handed Bram her milk, which she gulped down in one go.

“Thanks,” she said, “I feel much better! Now I can finally talk to you, m’kay?”

“About what?”

She had made such a big scene all because she wanted to talk to Anima after he’d left her hanging when he’d promptly headed back to his family following their battle. He was ready to talk, so he stared at her, urging her to say what she wanted to say. As he did, Bram smacked her flushed cheeks and started fidgeting.

“You staring at me like that is making my heart go on a rampage, m’kay?! Thinking about what comes next is making me nervous! And I get thirsty when I’m nervous, m’kay?!”

“Why? What comes next?”

Had she come to challenge him again? Her will to fight should have been gone, but if she were intending to challenge a powerful foe, that would explain her nervousness.

His conjecture didn’t get any further than that. With a *whoosh*, Bram slid in next to him and grabbed his hand with both of hers.

“Our lovey-dovey newlywed life, m’kay?”



Anima was completely, utterly lost.

“You cheated on Mommy?”

Myuke glared at him. He was dying to know where the wedding talk was coming from, and her wedding dress showed that she was serious about the whole thing, but he had more important matters to attend to first.

“I would never do that.”

“Yeah, that figures. Who in their right mind would go after a shorty like her?”

“You’re one to talk, midget, m’kay?” Bram glared at Myuke after being brushed off.

“I’m a giant compared to you!”

Realizing that Myuke was actually taller than her, Bram averted her gaze. She was fighting a losing battle, so she needed to find a different approach. Moments later, she swung her head back toward Myuke.

“Tell me how old you are, m’kay?”

“I’m twelve.”

“You’re older, and that’s all you could muster?” Bram smirked. “Pathetic, m’kay?”

“You’ve got some nerve to mouth off to your elders! Right, Daddy? Tell her!”

Bram’s eyes popped wide open.

“Y-You’re Anima’s daughter? M’kay…”

“I am.”

“S-So that makes you my step-daughte—”

“Are you nuts?! Luina is my one and only mother, and that’ll never change!”

That revelation was a blow to Bram, so much so that she waddled backward. Trembling, she looked to Anima for comfort.

“You’re married? Tell me the truth, m’kay?”

“I am.”

“Get a divorce, m’kay?”

“We won’t,” Luina said snappishly, taking control of the conversation.

“Why not?!” Bram blurted in a fit of rage while she glared at Luina. “Just do what I tell you, m’kay?!”

“No. I love Anima, so that’s not going to happen.”

“I love you too, Luina.”

Anima reached for Luina’s hand and linked his fingers together with hers. The sight was too much for Bram, who started to tear up.

“Why?! You could fish up a whole school with those looks, so why’d you have to catch Anima?! Go find someone else, m’kay?!”

“Then why do you want to marry Daddy? I admit, he’s cool as hell, but there are other men out there!”

“Because they’re all weaker than me! I want a family that’s strong, m’kay?!”

“Oh, so that’s what you meant when you said I ‘passed’ at the end of our fight.”

Anima had finally caught on, to some extent. He still had no idea why she longed for a strong family, though.

“Every other man, all those people who came to exterminate me, failed. You’re the only one worthy of becoming my husband, m’kay?”

Bram gave an enthusiastic speech in hopes of convincing Anima to marry her. He didn’t mind the attention, but what she was proposing was out of the question. There was only one girl in the whole wide world he would ever call his wife, and that was Luina.

“Excuse me, Lord Anima,” Shaer interrupted, “but we have to hurry.”

They were all going to miss the boarding call if they spent any longer standing around. Anima couldn’t have that; not when the girls were so excited to ride the ship. Even so, he couldn’t ignore a weeping girl either.

“I’ll pay for your ticket, so tell me everything on the ship, okay?”

Bram’s tears immediately dried up, and her face blossomed into a euphoric

smile.

Chapter Five: The Demon Lord Makes For the Capital

The group of six boarded a large black ship. Its long, narrow hull arched upward at both ends, giving it a banana-like shape. The captain steered the ship from his cabin housed at the stern of the main deck, while the crew kept an eye on the waters from the bow. Five sails bulged in the wind, and the majestic ship set sail, cutting through the vast sea under the bright midday sun.

“So faaast!”

“This thing can really move!”

The girls excitedly watched as they sailed the sea. It was the same sea they had been looking at earlier in the day, but seeing it as they leaned over the side of a ship was a completely different experience. The water had seemed quite calm from the lighthouse, but the small waves packed quite a punch, ruthlessly bashing against the ship to make it rock back and forth. The rocking wasn’t anything special on its own, but combined with the cold, salty sea breeze passing by them, it was the perfect recipe for setting off on a grand adventure.

“Impressive,” Anima murmured as he watched the port town get smaller and smaller.

Next to him, Luina was watching over the girls while holding her long hair back to keep it from blowing into her face. Suddenly, she looked up and pointed into the distance.

“Girls, look.”

She directed their attention to a cliffside with a white lighthouse at the top—the very lighthouse they had climbed just a couple of hours earlier. It had seemed massive from up close, but it looked like an oddly-colored pole sticking out of the ground from a distance.

“Bye-bye, lihhouse!”

Marie waved goodbye to the lighthouse. The moment she took her hands off the ship’s gunwale, a strong gust of wind pushed her small body up against it.

“Whoa!” Anima quickly grabbed her, lifting her into his arms, then slowly put her back down.

“Man, we got so far already! At this rate, we’ll be at the next stop in a flash!” Myuke excitedly noted, keeping her eyes on the barely-visible lighthouse.

“Wheressa ness top?”

“It’s the capital, Marie.”

“The capital, huh…”

The adventurous smile faded from Myuke’s face. She must have realized that their fun trip was coming to an end. Her saddened expression was proof of how much she loved their journey. Hoping to cheer her up, Anima gently placed his hand on her head and turned to her with a big smile.

“What do you want to do first once we arrive?”

Her smile returned, wider than before. That brief moment of sadness had quickly become a thing of the past.

“I wanna play at the beach!”

“Me too! Me toooo!”

“That’s that, then. Our first trip will be to the beach.” The girls looked toward their destination with excited smiles, their minds full of all the fun things waiting for them at the beach. “Shaer, when will we arrive at the capital?”

“The capital city is rather close to the port, so I believe we should arrive just before sunset. With that in mind, as it’s dangerous to swim in the dark, I’d advise that you hold off on going to the beach until tomorrow.”

“Is our audience with the king tomorrow as well?”

Shaer nodded.

“His Majesty is intrigued by the prospect of hearing your story. He’d like to meet you as soon as possible, so I arranged the meeting for tomorrow.”

Shaer had already relayed the necessary information to the king, and had arranged an audience with him for the next day. With the battle to protect his family’s peaceful life quickly approaching, Anima, for the first time in ages,

started to feel nervous. To calm his nerves, he wanted to play with the girls on the beach before their meeting. Shaer agreed to his proposal.

“By the way,” she added with a warm smile, “wouldn’t it be better to move to our cabins? The deck is getting rather cold.”

“We can’t play on the beach if we’re bedridden,” Luina agreed, nodding.

“Good point. Why don’t we go inside?”

As the winds of a new adventure—exploring their cabins—reached the girls’ ears, they excitedly turned around from watching the waves pass by and joined the adults.

“Room! Where my room?”

“We got the most expensive room, right? Can’t wait to see what it’s like!”

“Let’s get going, m’kay?”

The childish voice that had chimed in from Anima’s side belonged to Bram, whose long hair, split into pigtails, fluttered in the wind. She clung to Anima’s arm as she spoke, a bold display of affection that wasn’t going to fly. Not in front of Myuke, who shot a huffing glare at her.

“What are you getting all excited for?”

“Anima paid for my ticket. That includes the room, m’kay?”

“I only paid for the ticket; Shaer covered your room.”

Anima wanted to give credit where it was due, especially given how much Shaer had done to ensure that the family would enjoy their trip to the capital. First-class cabins were private, while second-class ones were shared spaces with multiple beds, requiring their residents to interact with other passengers. The girls were having fun just riding the ferry, so the specific room didn’t matter to them whatsoever, but Shaer had gone the extra mile and booked them and their parents first-class rooms.

“Hear that? You get to go enjoy hanging out with the other passengers in second-class!”

“Nooo! I wanna be with Anima, m’kay?”

“How about you let go of Daddy?!”

Myuke only got more annoyed at the sight of Bram’s lovestruck smile. She absolutely despised the girl who had proclaimed herself Anima’s wife, even if she knew such a thing was completely preposterous. Still, the anger Myuke felt toward someone trying to tear her precious family apart was far from abnormal. Bram, on the other hand, must have felt that Myuke was the biggest hurdle in winning Anima’s heart.

“NO FIGHT!”

Marie’s ear-splitting scream froze the girls on the spot. They stopped pulling on Anima’s arms, and their vicious glares were washed over by a shadow of guilt. Once they’d all finally settled down, they headed for the stairs leading to the interior of the ship.

The inside was split into three floors: the top housed the crew alongside the first-class passengers, the middle was equipped for second-class passengers, and the lowest was used for storage. The middle and lower floors had no windows, as they were close to the waterline and presented a flooding risk. Without a magic stone to light the lamps dotting either floor, they were pitch black. The top floor was the only one far enough from the waterline to allow for small, round windows.

Anima and his family’s cabin was at the stern of the uppermost floor, situated directly below the captain’s cabin. Thanks to its location at the very back of the ship, it was the most spacious and well-equipped room onboard. A window on one of the walls allowed sunlight to seep into their cabin, keeping it lit up for when they entered.

“Sea! I see the sea! Mommy, look! Sea!”

Marie rushed up to the window and stretched herself out to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

“Look, a bunk bed! I was just thinking I wanted to take a nap!”

“I want up!”

Marie’s love for her sister was stronger than her appreciation for the scenery, as her attention immediately shifted to the bed. She followed Myuke up the

ladder, and they both laid down on the top bunk.

Besides the bed, the cabin also came equipped with two chairs that more than suited a first-class room. Anima set his bag down in a corner of the room and sat down on one of the chairs. Following his lead, Luina sat across him.

“It’s a little cramped with so many people in here.” Myuke shared her opinion from the top of the bed. The cabin was relatively big for what it was, but they’d crammed six people into the room. It was bound to be rather snug with that many people, even in the ship’s largest room. “Though only because of that pesky sixth wheel.”

Shaer hung her head after Myuke’s comment.

“I’m terribly sorry for disturbing your idyllic family trip. I’ll take my leave…” Shaer said dejectedly, hanging her head. It sent Myuke into a panic.

“N-No, no, I didn’t mean you!”

“I, I love you thiiis much!”

Marie’s kind words put a delighted smile on Shaer’s face.

“Thank you, that means a lot. However, I truly don’t want to intrude on your private time. Henceforth, I would like to hear of the crimes this girl committed on the bridge. If I find her explanation reasonable, I shall take my leave.”

She’d let Bram off the hook once, but she couldn’t allow herself that luxury while they were making their way to the capital. Normally, Bram’s actions would have given her a one-way ticket to prison, but she was a special case considering her age. The judge presiding over her case was the king himself, and the decision was ultimately up to him, but Shaer wanted to understand the circumstances that had led her to that bridge to see if they could be used to help her avoid doing time.

“I didn’t commit any crimes, m’kay?” Bram stated, confident in her innocence.

“You blocked the bridge for weeks.”

“I would always let women and children through! And I was gonna let the men through after I fought them! It’s not my fault they ran back home to their mommies, m’kay?”

“What did you expect?” Myuke rebuked. “A huge dragon asking people to fight it if they wanted to cross the bridge would scare anyone.”

Bram was being talked down to, both figuratively and literally. Her anger began to boil over, and she erupted at Myuke.

“What do you gotta butt in for?! Like you could ever understand how I feel when you’ve got a sturdy dad! Don’t put me in the same boat as you, m’kay?!”

“Daddy is sturdy, but that doesn’t have to do with anything!”

“It does! It has to do with *everything*! My parents were weak! They were super weak… m’kay…?”

Bram’s heart-wrenching scream immediately silenced Myuke. Anima, who’d been listening silently to their spat, gave her the warmest look he could muster.

“Bram, are you all alone?” he asked, making sure to choose his words very carefully.

Large tears began streaming down her face. She clutched into the hem of her skirt and slowly opened her mouth.

“Mom and Dad passed away. They left me behind. They were weak… Mom’s been gone since… I don’t even know how long ago, and Dad left just a year ago… m’kay?”

“I see.” Anima gently stroked Bram’s head to comfort her, sliding his hand down her long, fluffy hair. “It must have been hard for you.”

She nodded deeply. Longing for warmth, she then looked up at Anima and grabbed his hand.

“That’s why I want a family, m’kay? Someone who won’t die, and…”

Anima was all too familiar with the crushing pain of loneliness. But unlike him, who was ostracized by his family, the deep pain Bram felt seemed to have been because she’d been treasured by hers. He had no way to conceptualize her pain —the pain of being pushed from the warm embrace of happiness and into the dark pit of suffering, where her tiny body was torn apart by insurmountable grief.

In the year since she’d lost her father, she’d had no one to rely on. There was

no one to praise her, no one to hold her, no one to love her; her days were filled only with darkness and pain. That was why she was looking for a family that would outlive her, because she didn't want to relive the pain of losing the ones she held dear. In order to find that family, she'd set up shop on the bridge and patiently waited for the person she'd dreamt of to arrive. It was a reckless method, but she had become unable to bear the weight of being alone.

"Mm, so that's why you asked if I have any chronic diseases," Anima murmured. It all finally made sense to him.

Bram nodded once more, then looked up at Anima again. A glint of hope flashed in her wet eyes as she put on a delighted smile.

"I never expected to find someone like you, Anima! You're healthy as an ox, sturdy as a rock, and stronger than anyone I've ever met! You exceeded all my expectations, m'kay?"

It might have been a bit boastful of him, but Anima knew that very few people, if anyone at all, could compete with his strength. Moreover, his sturdiness would guarantee that if they were to get married, she would never have to suffer the pain of being alone again. He must have been the light that would finally release Bram from the darkness that was her eternal prison of loneliness. She had finally found someone she could spend the rest of her life with in peace.

Anima understood what she was feeling—at least to an extent—and wanted to help her overcome her grief. If he could, he wanted to eliminate loneliness from the lives of children. Even so…

"I can't be your husband."

Giving her no room for debate, he turned Bram down. The glimmer immediately faded from her eyes.

"At least tell me why, m'kay?"

"It's because there's only one woman I'll ever love, and that's Luina." Her eyes popped wide open as she just woke up from a sweet dream, and filled with darkness. She covered her face with her hands and slowly slid them down, but Anima flashed a gentle smile. "Now, while I can't be your husband, what I could

be is your father.”

Bram slowly looked up.

“My father…? M’kay…” Bram asked, slowly turning her eyes upward.

“Yes, your father. You said you want a family, right? In other words, you aren’t necessarily looking for a husband. Am I mistaken?”

She slowly shook her head.

“Y-You’re not wrong, but… I would be living with you forever, m’kay? Would that be a problem?”

“Not at all. What do you think?”

He looked at Luina, who answered with a warm smile.

“We were always a large family, so I’m used to a lively household. We’d love for you to be a part of that, if it’s something you want as well.”

All the kind, warm gazes set on her put a happy, genuine smile on Bram’s face.

“You lib with us?”

“I’d love to, but… You’d better be sure about this, m’kay?”

“Uh-huh!” Marie answered with a bright smile. “I like fends to pay with!”

Bram’s entire face radiated joy.

“I’m so happy! But I need you to be okay with this too, m’kay?”

Filled with hope, she looked at Myuke, who huffed timidly at her.

“If you don’t work, you don’t eat! Drill that into your stupid head!”

“Don’t you worry, Shorty! I’ll work *and* eat more than you, m’kay?”

“Don’t call me ‘Shorty’! I’m older than you, so you’d better show me some respect! Just use my name, got it?!”

“Gotcha! I appreciate it a ton, m’kay?”

“You can call me ‘Mommy’.”

“I will! Thank you, Mommy, m’kay?”

“And I like being called ‘Daddy’.”

Anima’s desire to hear Bram say the magic word was practically audible in his voice. He was excited for the moment she would say it, but her face betrayed her unease.

“I… wanna save that for later, m’kay?”

A long time had passed since she’d lost her mother, but her father had only been gone for a year. It was no wonder she was hesitant to call Anima ‘Daddy’.

Anima wanted to get her approval as a father, but he couldn’t ignore her feelings. Instead of pressuring her into it, raising her with love and care like he did Myuke and Marie seemed like a much better option. There was no reason for her to rush; when the time finally came, she would surely say that magic word on her own.

“Don’t feel like you have to call me that. Take it slow, and only do it when you’re ready.” Bram nodded. The beautiful smile from finally having her wish come true still hadn’t faded from her curiously pale face. “…Are you okay?”

She put her hands in front of her mouth.

“I-I finally had the chance to catch my breath, and now I’m feeling sick, m’kay…?”

“You must be getting seasick. Here, lie down.”

Bram looked at Anima and Luina with a pleading gaze.

“I’d like to sleep with you, if that’s okay, m’kay…?”

“Of course it is,” Luina said with a smile.

“That’s just fine.”

Other options had never existed. Both Anima and Luina loved fulfilling their children’s wishes. They lay down on either side of the bed, letting Bram take the middle. Conversely, Shaer, satisfied with Bram’s reasoning and the outcome of the resulting discussion, took her leave.

“It’s so warm, m’kay…?”



Bram's smile somehow made her complexion look better. Lured in by that happy sight, Marie climbed onto Anima's stomach.

"I wanna seep 'gever too!"

"Come on over here."

Anima gently embraced Marie, who buried her face into his chest. It was pretty cramped, but Bram was enjoying every moment of it. She'd waited for so long to cuddle up with a family of her very own, and that dream had become a reality at long last.

"She fell asleep so quickly."

"Yeah. Marie is out too."

"She loves your stomach to bits," Myuke whispered, careful not to wake the sleeping girls. She then climbed down from the top bunk. "Umm, Daddy? It's probably more comfortable for you up here."

"I think I'll stay here. Wouldn't want to wake them up."

"All right. Mommy?"

"Sorry, I'm completely trapped."

"Tch. Yeah, okay. Whatever."

Myuke sulkily returned to the top of the bunk bed. She must have been sad about being left out of the family slumber party.

"Come, join us. You can wedge yourself in here."

"There's still space next to me."

"I said it's fine!" she moped from atop her bed. "I like it up here!"

Anima promised himself to spend extra time playing with her once they'd arrived at the capital, then closed his eyes.

There's no way I could fall asleep like this!

His eyes flew open. There was no way he could let his daughter fall asleep all alone, sobbing into her pillow. He glanced to his side, where his gaze met Luina's. That simple, silent exchange was enough for the couple to agree on a

course of action. Luina nodded, then Anima cleared his throat.

“Oh jeez, I can’t seem to fall asleep. I wonder why that could be. Can you sleep, Luina?”

“No, not at all. I always fall asleep so quickly, but not even counting sheep seems to be helping. It’s very strange.”

“Strange indeed… Ah, I know! Could it be because Myuke isn’t here?”

The bed above them gave off a short creak.

“Oh, that must be it! Falling asleep is so easy when Myuke’s with us.”

“You’re exactly right. Ah, but curse our luck, that leaves us in quite the conundrum. Myuke said she wants to sleep alone.”

“Whatever will we do now…?”

With a few more creaks, Myuke made her way down the ladder. She gazed bashfully at Luina and Anima, her arms crossed.

“Where should I sleep?”

They both cracked a smile.

“Come, sleep with Daddy.”

“No, sleep with me instead.”

Myuke was happy about all the attention she was getting. With a broad smile, she snuggled into the bed and squeezed herself between Bram and Luina.

“Drat, Mommy won you over.”

“Hooray! I won a Myuke!”

Luina rubbed her cheek against Myuke’s red hair, causing Myuke’s face to flush a similar color.

“I-I’m gonna sleep with Mommy tonight, but don’t take it personally! I don’t hate you! Like, at all! I mean it!”

“That means a lot. Why don’t we sleep together tomorrow?”

“I-If that’s what you want. I like sleeping with you, too.”

Myuke's mumbles trailed off, leaving the room silent. At last, Anima could indulge himself in the sweetness of rest while on the open sea.

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As the ferry began its docking procedures, the sun began its descent below the horizon, painting the sky a bright orange. The family, its newest member included, disembarked and walked the long, robust pier.

"Are you afraid of the dark?" Anima asked Bram.

"Not when I hold your hand, m'kay?" she answered with a smile while clutching his hand. The comfy afternoon nap had healed her seasickness, and she was walking alongside the others at a brisk pace.

"Bye-bye, sun!"

"See you tomorrow!"

Next to them, Luina and the girls waved goodbye to the setting sun. She watched the sun duck below sea level with a longing smile.

"It's beautiful," Luina said.

"Not as beautiful as you."

"Ah, there you go again."

She flashed a bashful smile, made even more adorable by the slight blush on her cheeks.

"I see you love Mommy lots, m'kay?"

"You bet! He loves her more than anything, so don't even think about trying to take her place! Their bond is eternal!"

"Don't get preachy on me, m'kay? Do I seriously have to spell this out for you? I'm too happy now to even consider making him my husband, m'kay?"

"I sure hope so…"

Myuke gave up on pestering her any further. She must've understood how satisfied Bram was with her situation. At the very least, she didn't seem to be worried about Bram taking advantage of a momentary squabble to try to split her family apart.

“All this talking’s got me fired up! Makes me wanna run as far as I can, m’kay?!”

“Don’t. That’s dangerous,” Myuke warned.

“I’m not some clumsy klutz! Hey, let’s race, m’kay?”

“I’ll pass, thanks.”

“Scared you’ll lose? That’s weak, m’kay?”

“I am not! But one misstep will ruin our whole trip! It’s not worth the risk!”

“You’re such a worrywart, m’kay?”

“Oh yeah? And just who do you think I’m worried about, hmm?”

Bram was dumbstruck.

“Y-You’re worried about… me? M’kay…”

“Of course I am, dummy! You might be kinda feisty, but you’re still my little sister.”

Bram’s face lit up with a beautiful smile. She embraced Myuke and rubbed their cheeks together.

“Whoa, wha—?! What are you doing?!”

“I’m just so happy, m’kay?! I thought you hated me! You glare at me all the time, and you’re so strict! It’s scary, m’kay?!”

“Don’t blame me for getting mad when you were trying to steal my Daddy! And warn me before hugs. I almost jumped out of my skin.”

“There’s that glare again, m’kay?”

“I’m not even mad!”

Myuke was shouting, but the smile on her face was genuine. She must have been enjoying having someone to banter with again, like she’d had in the old days. With the addition of their newest family member, Bram, the Scarlett household had gotten even livelier.

Anima kept walking while listening to their small quarrel. As he reached the end of the pier and the cityscape came into view, he looked around. A couple of

people were enjoying the view of the sunset from the beautiful, sandy beach. Considering the time of the day, the lack of visitors seemed pretty standard; the area was probably packed during the day.

“I wanna pay!”

“I’d love to play too, but it’s getting dark. We’ll come back tomorrow, okay?”

“’Kaaay!”

“Want to play with Daddy? I’ll make sure you don’t go under.”

“Uh-huh!”

Marie gazed at the sea, full of excitement, while Anima was fighting with his inner demons. On one hand, he wanted to see his cute daughters enjoy their day at the beach, but on the other, he was deathly afraid of the chance that one of them might drown.

“Shaer, are these waters safe?”

“Perfectly safe. The tides are weak, and the water is quite shallow around here. You should be able to take Miss Marie swimming without issue.”

“That’s fantastic, thank you.” Anima let out a sigh of relief. Even if the water was shallow, though, he couldn’t let himself take his eyes off Marie even for a second. Not when she was swimming, at least; his eyes were set on something else. “It’s pretty bold of them to walk around in… that.”

The people on the beach were wearing nothing but their underwear. It may have been getting dark, but seeing people walk around practically naked shocked him to his core. He didn’t know why they were doing it, but the reason behind their unsightly display was unimportant when they were clearly disturbing the public order.

Though having alcohol involved would’ve raised another issue. Anima didn’t want to let his girls run freely around a bunch of drunkards. Either way, one thing was clear: he had to stay on high alert to ensure his girls a carefree, unforgettable day on the beach.

“Those are swimsuits.”

Luina’s calm, collected voice swayed Anima’s burning passion for protecting

his girls' purity.

"'Swimsuits'?"

"Clothes specifically designed for swimming."

"Something like that exists?" If that was the case, the people at the beach posed no threat. Anima let out a relieved sigh, then came to a realization: given swimsuits' similarity to underwear, there was a chance Luina had thrown one into her bag without him noticing it. "Do you have a swimsuit, Luina?"

"I don't."

"I see…"

Luina glanced at him.

"Did you want to see me wearing one?"

"To tell you the truth, that is exactly what I was hoping for."

Just catching a glimpse from far away was enough for him to understand the magic of swimsuits. Imagining his beautiful wife's perfect figure clad in clothing like that put a smirk on his face.

"It's embarrassing, but… I'd wear a swimsuit for you."

"Do you mean that?! All right, we have to get one right now!"

"You're getting too excited, Daddy," Myuke said, and dropped her shoulders. "Though I guess I can't really blame you for wanting to see Mommy in a swimsuit."

"I want to see you wear one too."

"Wait, I can get one too?"

"Of course! Playing at the beach will be a lot more fun if you're in a swimsuit, won't it? We'll get ones for Marie and Bram, too."

"Yaaay!"

"I'm so happy! I've always wanted to visit the beach with my family, m'kay?!"

Bram had likely never gotten to experience such an outing with her sickly parents. As a result, she was more excited about having fun with her family on

the beach than getting a new swimsuit. Channeling that excitement, she and the others shifted their gazes from the coast to the city ahead.

“Aww, what a neat place!” Myuke exclaimed the moment they entered the city.

Setting foot into the colorful cityscape lifted their spirits. Homeowners in the capital were given free rein over painting their homes, so each individual house was painted a different, vivid color. Walking the streets was like visiting a carnival.

“It’s as breathtaking as I remember it,” Luina whispered as she walked the moonlit road.

“Have you stayed here before?”

“Yes, in a health resort nearby. There are a lot of inns and restaurants specifically aimed at tourists here. To this day, I can clearly remember waking up in the morning, going to the nearby shop to enjoy a fresh seafood platter, then walking to the beach right after that.” Her genuine smile as she recalled her experience in the capital captivated Anima. That smile suddenly grew even bigger, and she pointed at a bright-green building. “Ah, look! That’s the place we were staying at. It brings back so many memories.”

“Then why don’t we stay there? What about you, Shaer?”

“I’ll head back to my home.”

“Do you live somewhere around here?”

“Yes, in the castle town. It would take a couple of hours on foot, but I should arrive there in twenty minutes or so if I fly.”

“All right, we’ll say goodbye for the time being, then. What should I expect tomorrow?”

“I’d like to be finished by sunset, so I was thinking of coming here to pick you up around noon. We can take a carriage from here to the castle.”

“Me too! Cabbage ride!”

“I wanna ride too, m’kay?”

“Daddy has work to do. I doubt he can drag the three of us along with him.”

Myuke shot the idea down, but she clearly wanted to ride in a carriage. Anima couldn’t take them into the castle, but bringing them to the castle town was fair game.

“We can all ride to the castle town together,” he suggested in an uplifting voice.

“Riding carriages is what princesses get to do, right?!” Myuke asked with a huge smile and sparkling eyes.

“It sure is. Perfect for my little princess.”

“I’m totally sleeping with you tonight, Daddy!” she exclaimed sweetly, happily clinging to his arm as he gently pet her head.

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The next morning, the five of them went out to buy swimsuits and beach slippers after a delicious breakfast, then returned to their lodging. There, they quickly changed into their swimsuits before heading to the beach.

“Beach tiiime!”

The beautiful azure water sparkled under the bright sunlight, and the people on the beach enjoyed their time playing in the fine, sugar-like sand and the warm water. It was relatively early, but the beach was bursting with life. The curved shoreline went on almost as far as the eye could see, so there was enough space for everyone—including the girls—to enjoy the wonderful weather and the expansive sea to their hearts’ content.

“Wow, it’s super busy!”

“This is so exciting, m’kay?!”

The gentle breeze carried their cheerful voices towards the horizon. Myuke and Bram could barely contain their excitement.

“I wanna pay!”

Seeing all the families having the time of their lives, Marie set off through the warm sand, leaving tiny footprints behind.

“I wanna play too!” Anima exclaimed, and took her hand.

The water may have been shallow, but even the tiniest of waves had the potential to swallow up a child of Marie’s age. He wanted to stay by her side the whole time to avoid any possibility of something terrible happening.

“Yaaay! I pay, Daddy!”

Marie hopped into the air like a bunny, making the frills on her adorable swimsuit flutter.

“This weather is just awesome!”

“It’s a perfect day for the beach, m’kay?!”

The two girls were in perfect sync. They had only gotten more excited after changing into their swimsuits.

“I can’t wait, m’kay?” Bram took her sandals off and set off barefoot through the sand before leaping high into the air. “It’s pretty hot! But it’s really soft! It feels great, m’kay?!”

“Oh wow, you’re right! The sand is so soft here!”

“Me too! No sooes!”

“Here, Marie, let me hold onto your sandals.”

“Thanks, Daddy! Ah, wooow! Sooo soff!”

The girls kept running around, playfully chasing each other. They seemed to love the area they were in, so Anima opened up a blanket and set it down on the sand. Right as he finished laying it out, the girls crashed onto and rolled around on it.

“Be careful, girls,” Luina warned with a gentle smile. “Don’t tire yourselves out before you get into the water.”

Anima also wanted to flash a gentle smile, but all he could muster was an awkward smirk. He was completely entranced by Luina’s bikini. Her voluptuous breasts lasciviously peeked out from beneath it, and it left her shapely thighs completely bare. Not even the young women frolicking around them could get Anima to pry his eyes away from his wife.

Get it together, Anima!

He shook his head. No matter how wonderful the sight before him was, he had to keep a close eye on his daughters. With his determination steeled, he sat down next to Luina, yet that steel slowly rusted and crumbled. As he stole a glance to the side, his eyes met Luina's, and she immediately averted her gaze.

"Are you okay, Luina?" he asked, curious about her uncharacteristic action. "Your cheeks are surprisingly red."

"Ah, I-I'm okay…"

"Ooh, I know what's going on! You totally think Daddy's hot!"

Myuke seemed to have hit the nail on the head, as Luina's cheeks got even redder at the suggestion.

"Yeah, your body's sick! You're like a man of steel, m'kay?"

"Daddy stong!"

"You bet I am! I'll protect you girls from any harm. Of course, I'll protect you too, Luina."

"I know you will. I'm happy to have married such a reliable man."

"Say, can we go swimming soon?"

"Let's go, m'kay?!"

"All right, let's get in the water!"

They hopped up from the blanket, set their sandals down, and rushed into the water.

"Hyahn, cold! But I likeses it!" Marie exclaimed while splashing around in the water with her tiny feet. Myuke and Bram were enjoying the water as well, but being so close to the shore was a bit underwhelming for them.

"Can we go in deeper?"

"Of course, but be careful. Stay above the water."

"We'll be fine. I'll be with her, m'kay?"

"Hah, like I'd ever need *your* help! I swim like a mermaid!"

“Oh, really? Then let’s put that to the test, m’kay?”

“Don’t cry when I show you up!”

Sparks flew between them, but there was no trace of animosity in their words; they were both happy to have found a worthy rival. The pair went waist-deep into the water, where they started swimming. Anima stayed in the shallower water, playing with Marie and Luina while watching over them from the corner of his eye.

“Cooold! Spash me s’more!”

“There! Gotcha!”

“Hyahaha! Saldy!”

Marie wrapped her hands around her stomach and laughed. She thoroughly enjoyed spending time at the beach. Letting her make the most of her first time at the sea, they kept playing until Anima’s hands started to prune.

“Ha-chow!” Marie sneezed. Her lips were starting to turn blue as well.

“She must be cold. Should we take a break?”

“Yeah, let’s do that. Marie, do you want to roll around on the blanket with me?”

“Uh-huh! You know, you know, I’m super good at rollin’! Look, Daddy! Look! Vwoom, vwoom!”

Marie started rolling around in the sand, which, in the end, warmed her body up. Curiously, despite how proud she was of her rolling skills, she stopped almost as quickly as she started. She stood up and scanned the area in desperation.

“What are you looking for?”

“I wanna roll with Myukey ’n Brum…”

She was getting bored of playing by herself, so Anima pointed toward their blanket, where Myuke and Bram were playing in the sand.

“They’re right over there. See?”

“What you paying?” Marie asked as she scurried over to the blanket, followed

closely behind by Anima and Luina. The girls welcomed them with proud smirks.

“We’re building sandcastles!”

“Myuke wanted to see who can build a better castle! She was too hung up on losing our swimming contest, m’kay?”

“Say what?! I didn’t lose anything, thank you very much! I was a million times better than she was!”

“Oh, really? Then tell me why you said we should go back to the beach right after our contest, m’kay?”

“That’s because… It was because you started sneezing. I figured you were getting cold.”

Bram immediately hugged Myuke with a wide smile on her face after hearing her bashful admission.

“You’re super nice, m’kay?!”

“I told you to warn me before hugs!”

“I’m hugging you, m’kay?”

“I hug too!”

Marie clung to Myuke as well. Myuke’s delighted smile told everyone just how happy she was to get so much love from her little sisters.

“When cattle done?” Marie asked, looking curiously at the pile of sand beside her.

“I’ll be done before lunch. I’ll make you the cutest, most adorable castle you’ve ever seen, so get excited!”

“We’ll see about that! I’ll make a much better castle than you ever could, m’kay?!”

“Goo’ wuck!”

“I don’t need luck to beat her!”

“You’ve already lost, m’kay?”

They started building their castles while Marie cheered them on. She watched

them work from up-close, a huge smile on her face.

“Daddy, potty!”

She suddenly squeezed her legs together and tugged at Anima’s sleeve. Anima quickly picked her up.

“Do you remember where the closest bathroom is?” he asked Luina.

“Sorry, I have no idea…”

“All right, then I’ll take her back to the inn.”

“That should be faster than just searching the beach. I’ll keep an eye on these two in the meantime.”

“Thanks.”

He left the girls behind and took Marie back to the inn. She seemed hungry, so he got her some dried fruit after she’d finished in the bathroom, and they made their way back to the castles that were under construction.

“They done cattling?”

“I’m not sure, but I’m excited to see what they’ve made.”

“Uh-huh! Me too!”

They arrived back at the beach after only a couple of minutes, and headed directly toward their blanket.

“Apologize to Myuke right now, m’kay?!”

Bram’s angry roar shot through the beach. She was arguing with a young, tanned, well-built man. The man looked down at her with an annoyed gaze, while Luina was comforting Myuke as she sulked next to them.

“What’s going on?”

The moment Anima arrived, Bram aggressively pointed at the man.

“He hit on Mommy! Then he stomped on Myuke’s castle after he got rejected, m’kay?!”

“I told you, it was an accident!”

“No, it wasn’t, m’kay?! You even ground your feet into it after trampling on it!

No wonder Mommy turned you down! She knew right away that you're a spineless worm, m'kay?!"

"What did you say, brat?! C'mere and let me teach you what discipline is!" He raised a hand, ready to strike her with it, but Anima caught his arm. "Oww! What do you—"

The man turned to face Anima. In that instant, all blood drained from his face and the light left his eyes. As if he had just met the Reaper itself, his entire body shook with terror.

"Did you just attempt to hit my daughter?" Anima asked in a quiet, chilling voice.

"N-No, I just—"

"And you destroyed the sandcastle she worked so hard to build?"

"Th-That was an—"

Anima tightened his grip around the man's arm and stared straight into his eyes with burning rage.

"You will either listen to the crunch of your arm as it shatters, or you will apologize to my daughter from the bottom of your heart. Choose wisely."

As Anima released his arm, the man fell into the sand as if someone had pulled a chair out from under him. He dragged himself forward, and pressed his forehead into the sand.

"I'm sorry for destroying your castle! And I'm sorry for threatening you!"

He looked up at Anima, begging for forgiveness, but Anima completely ignored him and turned toward Myuke.

"What do you say, Myuke? Do you forgive him?" he asked in his sweetest, gentlest voice.

Myuke slowly looked up. She wiped her tears, sniffled twice, and glared at the man with her swollen, red eyes.

"Buzz off."

Hearing Myuke's judgment, Anima looked down at the man.

“Don’t show yourself before my family ever again.” The man scurried away on all fours, crawling for his life. After he disappeared from their sight, Anima gently pet Myuke’s head. “I’m sorry about your castle.”

“It was a really cool castle…” Myuke answered with the tiniest of nods.

“It was amazing, Myuke, m’kay?”

“You built it really well.”

Bram’s and Luina’s kind words put a tiny smile on her face. Anima clapped his hands together and addressed his family.

“How about we all build a sandcastle together?”

His cheerful voice was met by an even more cheerful nod by Marie.

“Me! I wanna!”

“Let’s work together to build the most amazing castle this beach has ever seen!”

“It’ll be the best castle ever, m’kay?!”

“I’ll make it a hundred times taller than my other one!”

With Myuke having cheered up, they started working on their brand new castle. It didn’t take long for their voices to echo across the beach.

“It’s done!”

As the final tower received its finishing touches, the five of them celebrated their incredible creation with a cheer and a round of high-fives.

Epilogue: The Demon Lord Achieves Peace

After an eventful morning at the beach, the family left for the castle town in a fancy two-horse carriage. The wheels of the carriage creaked as they made their way up the hill leading towards the central square.

“It’s pretty quiet, huh? I expected more to be going on in the capital.”

“This city isn’t a place for a blabbermouth like you, m’kay?”

“Pfft, okay! Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!”

“Myukey, Myukey, I love your tawkin’!”

“I love your talking too, Marie.”

Luina and Anima watched as the girls enjoyed the carriage ride through the castle town that was just as quiet and serene as Myuke had noted. As they got farther in, the colorful houses were gradually replaced by older, more historic-looking buildings.

“Ah, look! We can see the castle!”

“Wooow! So biiig!”

“It’s huge, m’kay?”

They gathered around Myuke and peered out the window. They were still far away from it, but the castle had been built to allow the king to easily watch over his land.

“We have arrived.”

The carriage came to a halt, and after a few moments, the driver opened the door. Next to him stood Shaer, who hadn’t wanted to disturb their family trip, so she had chosen to fly ahead.

“Did you find the ride satisfactory?”

“It was sooo fun!”

“I’m delighted to hear that.” Moved by Marie’s genuine smile, Shaer also

cracked a smile. “Lord Anima, shall we discuss the proceedings further? Lady Luina, please feel free to rest until we’ve finished. A room has already been paid for at the nearby inn. Please confirm your room number with the staff.”

“Thank you for your generosity.”

“Please, it’s only natural. I’m deeply grateful that you accepted my request, and that you accompanied me on this long trip. It must have been tiring.”

“Don’t worry about it. This was the perfect excuse for a fun family outing.”

“I’ve got a better family I could’ve ever dreamed of! I’m super thankful that you asked Anima to defeat me, m’kay?!”

“You’re welcome. Though I must admit, being thanked by someone I was ordered to subdue certainly feels strange,” she said in a gentle tone then turned around. “Shall we go, Lord Anima?”

“All right. See you in a bit, girls.”

“You goin’ out, Daddy?”

Marie stared at Anima with puppy-dog eyes. He crouched down and gently pet her head.

“I have to talk with Shaer for a little bit, but I’ll be back soon. Be a good girl and play with your sisters, okay?”

“’Kaaay!” Marie cheerfully nodded to Anima’s request. “I love paying with Myukey and Brum!”

“Good girl.”

Anima stood up and looked at Luina, who anxiously averted her gaze. Her anxiety was only natural—her family’s peace was hanging in the balance, left in the king’s hands. If the worst came to pass and the king declared Anima’s attack against Malshan to be treason, he could make Anima serve several decades in jail, or even sentence him to death.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be fine.”

The gentle confidence in his tone helped Luina to relax.

“We’ll be waiting for you.”

Anima answered with a smile, then left for the castle with Shaer. Along the way, he turned toward her and spoke.

“I’d like to confirm something.”

“What would that be?”

“The king is the highest-ranking person in the country, right?”

“W-Well, yes, he is. Why do you ask?”

“I’m not a very formal speaker.”

Anima had never had a superior or come across anyone worthy of his respect, so he had never learned how to address others politely. He didn’t plan to break down the door and go in spells blazing, hurling insults at the king, but he was afraid that he might accidentally let something slip and offend him. His own mouth dooming the peace he desired was his worst nightmare. Luckily for him, Shaer noticed his unrest and answered with a carefree smile.

“His Majesty is a generous ruler. As long as you treat him with the respect he deserves, your crude way with words won’t summon his wrath.”

“Thank goodness.”

With the last sliver of worry gone from Anima’s mind, he and Shaer arrived at the castle. They passed through the castle gates, then walked the pristine stone road leading through a breathtaking inner garden. After that, they wound their way down a series of long corridors, finally arriving at a gigantic door with a guard on either side. The guards tightened their stances upon spotting Shaer, who signaled with her eyes for them to open the door.

The massive, heavy door slowly opened, revealing a long red carpet that led all the way to a raised platform at the end of the audience chamber. A golden throne, further decorated with shining golden ornaments, stood upon the platform. On the throne sat a man around fifty years of age, whose gray hair and beard gave him an air of wisdom, while his refined clothes, made only from the finest silk, proved his authority. His brawny features lent truth to the rumors that he’d spent his younger years in the military, yet his eyes were mellow, like those of a saint. Just as Shaer had said, his fair but strict nature was apparent at a glance.

“Your Majesty, Lord Anima has arrived.”

Copying Shaer, Anima prostrated himself before the throne. The king nodded, acknowledging their arrival.

“Raise your heads. The long journey must have taken a lot out of you. You need not trouble yourself with formalities.” After receiving permission, Anima lifted his head. The king sent a look filled with gratitude towards his way. “Shaer has already informed me of your victory at the bridge. You have my gratitude.”

“You’re quite welcome, Your Majesty.”

His voice was audibly strained as he forced some semblance of politeness out of himself, but the king didn’t even flinch.

“Shaer’s report stated that you came out victorious without taking a single blow. Is that true?”

The king had absolute trust in his direct subordinate, Shaer, proven by his willingness to give audience to a random citizen that she’d vouched for. However, he seemed to have doubted Anima’s strength. All in all, Anima had expected as much—to have won a battle against an opponent who had one-sidedly defeated his very best troops was questionable, so to have done so and come out unscathed should have been unheard of.

“It is.”

“Is it also true that you defeated Merkalt?”

Anima’s expression stiffened as they quickly jumped straight to the heart of the reason for the audience.

“It is, Your Majesty. And I can prove it.”

Reaching into his pocket, Anima showed the king an earring inlaid with a red gem. It was Merkalt’s Crimson Dragon stone.

“So you can. That is most certainly the earring Merkalt always wore. There is no doubt that you defeated him.”

Anima nodded again.

“Do you need proof of my strength? I could spar with one of your guards.”

Fearing that his question would be interpreted as a threat, he made sure to clarify his intentions.

“There is no need. Instead, answer me this: why is it that you lack any visible injuries? Did you also defeat Merkalt without suffering any damage?”

“It only took one hit.”

“All the more reason not to test your strength here. I can tell that you are powerful, and I’m not one to put my men in danger for entertainment.” After a short pause, the king continued. “Now, I don’t doubt the report of my loyal knight, Shaer, but it is my duty to discuss two matters with you. First, the case of Bram, the girl you took in as a daughter.”

“Bram is my daughter now. Anyone who dares to lay a finger on my family will taste hell.”

Anima shot the king a sharp glare. His burning rage threatened to ignite the throne room, yet the king did not flinch. His gentle, warm smile never wavered.

“Please, calm yourself. She will not be punished. From the information given to me, she merely desired a family to call her own. Her actions, while large in scale, amount to nothing more than a child’s temper tantrum. Last I checked, that is not a crime.”

“I’m grateful for your considerate decision.”

His words soothed Anima’s rage, but that soothing lull barely lasted a moment. The king’s serious expression put Anima on guard. They were about to get into the most important part of their meeting.

“Now, let’s discuss the Merkalt incident. Losing him is a great blow to our country’s military force. We have other powerful knights such as Shaer at our disposal, however, what happened at the bridge proved that an exceedingly dangerous foe, unable to be subdued by our most powerful knights, could appear at any moment.” Anima listened very closely to the king’s words. “Losing access to a powerful individual like Merkalt puts our kingdom at great risk should we be faced with a cataclysmic event. For that reason, I would like you to take Merkalt’s place and sign a contract with us.”

“A contract like the one you had with the Scarletts?”

The king nodded.

“I hear you married into the Scarlett family. Is that correct?”

“Yes. I’m Luina’s husband.”

“Then, given their circumstances, I assume you’re curious about the specifics, are you not? We are offering an annual salary of three hundred gold pieces.”

It was Anima’s first time hearing about the pay that came with being a mercenary for the kingdom, and three hundred gold was a lot of money. It equaled three thousand silver pieces, ten times the amount he’d sold the golem stone for. With that much coming in every year, his family would live like royalty.

“I decline.”

The king raised an eyebrow in confusion. It wouldn’t have surprised Anima if he were the first in the history of the kingdom to turn down the honor of becoming a mercenary serving directly under the king.

“And why is that?”

“Because I love my family.”

“I have heard about your undying love for your family from Shaer. That is part of the reason behind my offer. I believe your family would be happy if you would agree to this contract and bring home nothing short of a fortune.”

“I won’t deny that the money would be nice, but it would also mean that I get to spend less time with my family. For me, my time together with them is more important than any worldly possession I could ever own.”

“I understand, but you see, issues our knights or the highest-ranking Hunters can’t solve only arise once every couple of years. With your strength far outshining Merkalt’s, I’m certain that such events would be dealt with swiftly by your hand. All in all, you wouldn’t lose much time with your family.”

The king was absolutely right; it was obvious that no one was strong enough to oppose Anima. He could rush to the battlefield, defeat the enemy, then head home. It was that simple. The most he would need to be away from home was a couple of days, but there was also the option that he could take his family on a

trip every time a job came up. Even so, Anima's determination was unshakable.

"I'm afraid I can't sign your contract. My wife… Luina lost her father during one of his missions as a mercenary for the kingdom. I don't care if I only have to deploy once a year or even just once a decade. It's not happening. I will never make her live with the fear that I might one day vanish from her life the way her father did."

Politeness went out the window halfway through, but the king listened carefully to everything Anima had to say.

"You would choose your wife's peace of mind over serving the kingdom?"

"Yes. And no amount of money will change that."

"I see…" the king answered in a disappointed tone, but Anima wasn't finished.

"That being said, dangers that threaten the kingdom also threaten my family. Plus, I've taken a liking to this country. Every place we visited during our trip was incredibly welcoming and peaceful. So, I swear on my name that if anything like the Harbinger threatens the kingdom again, I will stop it."

The king welcomed Anima's promise with a hearty laugh.

"Very well. I will overlook Merkalt's disappearance."

"I'm honored."

Achieving what he had come to do put a relieved smile on Anima's face.

"While I'd thoroughly enjoy conversing with you further," the king added, nodding, "I imagine you're dying to get back to your family. Here, take this for your trouble."

Shaer took an envelope from the king and walked it over to Anima.

"What's this?"

"Consider it a reward for all your hard work. Turn it in at any Hunter's Guild, and they'll exchange it for fifty gold pieces. You said you don't care for money, but I would very much appreciate it if you would accept."

"I'll use it to treat my family to a lovely dinner," Anima said as he took the envelope.

“I’m certain they’ll be delighted to hear that,” Shaer told him. “Your Majesty, if I may, I’ll show Anima to the Hunter’s Guild. Please excuse us.”

Shaer bowed to the king, and Anima followed her example, marking the end of his audience. The two made their way out of the castle, and Anima began walking toward his inn.

“Lord Anima, the Guild is this way.”

“I’d like to go back to my family first. I wouldn’t want to make them wait.”

“Your love for your family is truly extraordinary,” Shaer replied, and flashed an understanding smile. “I’ll wait for you outside the inn.”

“You should come in with me.”

“I wouldn’t want to get in the way of your private time.”

“You’re not in the way. Not to me, not to Luina, and certainly not to the children. Everyone has grown so fond of you.”

His confession made her fidget.

“I’m quite happy to hear that. In that case, please allow me to take you up on your generous offer.”

Her arm thoroughly twisted, Shaer and Anima made their way back to the inn.

“Daddy!”

The moment they entered, Marie rushed up to Anima and hugged him.

“I’m home!”

After he picked Marie up, Myuke and Bram ran over to him as well.

“Daddy, can you believe this?! Bram won’t let me sleep with you! She wants you all for herself!”

“Sleeping with you is so nice! I’m letting Myuke have the whole top bunk to herself, m’kay?”



Seeing their small scuffle warmed Anima's heart.

"Why don't we all sleep together tonight?"

"Ooh!" Bram clapped her hands together. "I'm all for it, m'kay?"

"It'll be super cramped, but whatever."

Myuke seemed to be okay with the idea. They ran to their backpacks and moved them to the top bunk.

"Welcome back, Anima."

Luina welcomed him with a smile.

"I'm home."

"It seems like everything went well."

"It did. I was pardoned for both the Bram and Malshan issues."

"Thank goodness." Luina let out a relieved sigh, but there was still a touch of concern in her eyes. "Anima… Did His Majesty offer to make you a mercenary?"

Just as Anima thought, she was worried that what had happened to her father would happen to him as well.

"He did, but I declined. I couldn't bear being away from you. I want to be by your side, always and forever."

The moment he said that, Luina bloomed a wonderful smile.

"I want to stay with you forever too, Anima!"

She tightly hugged him.

"A-Are you certain I'm not in the way?" Shaer asked. Watching their happy reunion from the sidelines must have been awkward for her, so Luina let go of Anima and looked at her with a gentle smile.

"Not in the slightest. In fact, I'm incredibly grateful to you, Shaer. Thank you for being our guide on this long journey."

"Thanks!" Marie cried cheerfully.

Shaer's cheeks flushed.

“I’m also grateful to you. Joining you on this wonderful journey was an experience I’ll never forget. It saddens me that the time to say goodbye is fast approaching… If I may be so selfish, I’d love to taste your cooking again sometime.”

“Why, of course. We’ll always welcome you with open arms.”

“You go home?” Marie asked with downcast eyes.

“No, Marie. We’re the ones going home. Today’s our last day here.”

“The trip’s already over… I joined in late, but I had tons of fun, m’kay?”

“It ober? I wanna do more! Lots more!”

Marie wanted to continue their trip. She hopped up and down like a bunny, proving how full of energy she was. Anima crouched down and pet her head.

“We did what we came here to do, but our trip isn’t over just yet. A trip lasts until you get back home.”

“Really?”

“Really really. And this wasn’t our last trip, either. Would you like to help me plan our next trip when we get home?”

“Uh-huh!”

“I *so* want to go to another hot spring! Oh, and fishing! I wanna go fishing again!”

“Fishing? That sounds awesome, m’kay?! Let’s go fishing! We’re having a contest to see who can catch the most fish, m’kay?!”

“I’ll make you regret challenging me! I’m a natural!”

“Myukey was sooo good! She catched lossa fissies! I catched lossa fissies too!”

“Wow, really? Good job, Marie! But don’t worry, I’ll catch lots of fishies too! I hope we go to a river on our next trip, m’kay?”

“That’d be neat, but climbing the mountain was awesome too! The view from up there was incredible!”

“And, and, the dadelins was so pitty!”

“Oh, yeah! That field of flowers was incredible too!”

“A river, a mountain, a field of flowers… I can’t choose! I’m totally lost, m’kay?!”

“There are a bunch of other cool places too! We really have to think this through.”

“Yeah we do! Let’s take our time and come up with the best trip ever, m’kay?”

“I help too!”

Anima and Luina watched with delighted smiles as the girls excitedly brainstormed.

“They’re super excited about the next trip.”

“It just goes to show how much fun they had on this one.”

“Did you have fun too?”

“Of course! Thank you so much for taking us with you on this journey.”

Luina wrapped her arm around Anima’s and buried her face into his shoulder.

“Thanks for twip, Daddy!”

“Yeah, it was awesome!”

“I’ve never been on such a fun trip before, m’kay?!”

While sharing their words of gratitude, the girls ran in to hug him too. Anima was drowning in a sea of happiness, but suddenly, their idyllic family moment was interrupted by a deep growl. Bram turned towards Myuke with a cheeky grin.

“Myuke, are you hungry *again*? Well, I guess it makes sense. I mean, you *are* still growing, m’kay?”

“So are you! And it wasn’t even me!”

“Not me too!”

“Mommy?”

“No, I’m sure it wasn’t me. Was it you, Anima?”

“It wasn’t.”

There was only one other person in the room. Everyone’s gazes gathered on Shaer, who, while blushing like a tomato, kept her eyes focused on the ground and pushed her stomach.

“I-I’m terribly sorry. My stomach seems to have ruined a heartwarming moment. I shall take my leave at once.”

She was feeling more and more like an unneeded addition to their group.

“Me too! I hungy too!”

Myuke nodded in response to Marie’s cheerful exclamation.

“I’m starving. Can we have dinner soon?”

“That’d be awesome, m’kay?! Shaer, you know this place like the back of your hand, don’tcha? Can you take us to a nice restaurant? In case you were wondering, I’m dying for some seafood, m’kay?”

The girls managed to cheer Shaer up as she confidently opened her mouth.

“I know of a very good seafood restaurant nearby! Allow me to show you there. Should we leave right away?”

“It would be nice to get there before it gets too crowded. Would you like to join us for dinner?”

“M-May I?”

She didn’t want to disturb their family dinner. All she had wanted was to show them the way to the restaurant, but Luina nodded happily.

“The more the merrier.”

“I agree. The trip lasts until we get home, but our journey together ends here. Girls, eat up! We’re celebrating tonight!”

Anima’s statement put a huge smile on the girls’ faces. Shaer chased after the three of them as they leaped out of the room in excitement.

“They’re all so excited,” Anima commented. “We’re going to have a busy trip

back home.”

“I imagine it’ll be busier than it was on the way here. We have Bram with us now, after all. She’s always so full of energy.”

“It’s no wonder. She wants to enjoy herself after all the pain she’s been through.”

“I’m sure she does. You know, she clung to me like a baby when we took that nap on the ferry. I want to make her feel at home the same way Marie and Myuke do.”

“I do too. We have to make sure to shower her with love and care every day so she doesn’t have to feel lonely ever again.”

“But you have to be careful. Myuke will go green with jealousy if Bram gets more attention from you than she does. They both love you a lot.”

“I know, but don’t worry. I won’t pick favorites. I love them both, and I love you, too. You’re all part of my precious family.”

Anima’s heartfelt confession put a smile on Luina’s face.

“How exactly do you love me?” she asked in her sweetest voice.

“Like this.”

Anima gently wrapped his arms around Luina’s waist and planted his lips on hers. After sharing a long, passionate kiss, Luina pulled back and gazed at Anima in complete ecstasy.

“I’m so happy,” she said. I can’t express my feelings well, but believe me when I say that I’m really, truly happy.”

“Your happiness is my happiness.”

As Anima’s warm smile spread to Luina, the door to the room flew open and the girls rushed in.

“I hungy!”

“My tummy’s gonna disappear if we don’t eat soon, m’kay?”

“C’mon! Let’s go!”

They desperately tugged at Anima’s and Luina’s hands.

“What a coincidence, I’m feeling hungry too.”

“Me too. We’re having a feast tonight!”

Anima’s heartfelt laughter filled the inn as he closed the door behind them and set out to share dinner with his lovely family.

Afterword

Hello again, I'm Nekomata Nuko.

Thank you for reading *Why Shouldn't a Detestable Demon Lord Fall in Love?!* volume two. I hope you enjoyed the tale of the Demon Lord Anima setting out on a journey with his family to protect the peace and comfort he'd finally secured himself at the end of volume one.

So, where should I start? November of 2018 marks four years since my first book was published, making it the start of my fifth year as an author. I never thought I'd make it this far, but that I have is all thanks to the continuous support of you, my dear reader. I'll do my best to keep working as an author, and I'd love it if you would keep supporting me in my future endeavors.

I have an exciting announcement to share with you all today. We're planning a manga based on this series! I can't wait to see how the relationship between a lovestruck Demon Lord and an everyday town girl will look all drawn up on paper. I'm excited as an author, but even more so as a fellow reader.

Now then, it's time to go back to expressing my gratitude to all the wonderful people who worked on this release:

First, I'd like to say thanks to my editor, as well as everyone working at HJ Bunko. I hope we can work together again. I'll work hard to write stories that meet your high standards.

teffish, I can't thank you enough for taking time out of your busy schedule to draw the wonderful illustrations that make this book so much more fun to read.

I'd also like to thank my proofreader, designer, and everyone else who helped make this book a reality. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

And of course, my heartfelt thanks to you, my dear reader. Having you read and hopefully enjoy my book is the root of my happiness. If you had fun reading this book for even a second, I consider it a blessing. I hope we'll see each other again in the next volume. Until then.

A very cold day in 2018,

Nekomata Nuko.

1. Cover


Why Shouldn't a Detestable Demon Lord
FALL IN LOVE?!
2
STORY:
Nekomata Nuko
ILLUSTRATION:
teffish
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